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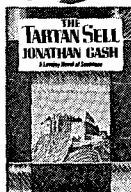
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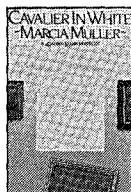
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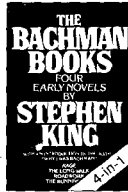
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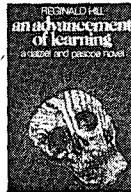
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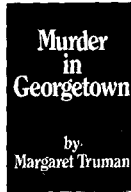
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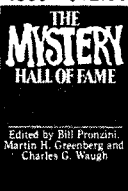
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EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

It will soon be time again for the annual autumn gathering of mystery writers and readers known as Bouchercon. This year's event—Bouchercon XVII—will take place from October 10-12 in Baltimore, with Donald Westlake as Guest of Honor. The convention will meet at the Sheraton Inner Harbor Hotel and will, we are sure, involve a number of events, principally including panel discussions by various mystery authors. The organizers promise other special events, perhaps including a visit to Poe's grave at midnight, and the screening of mystery movies from the past.

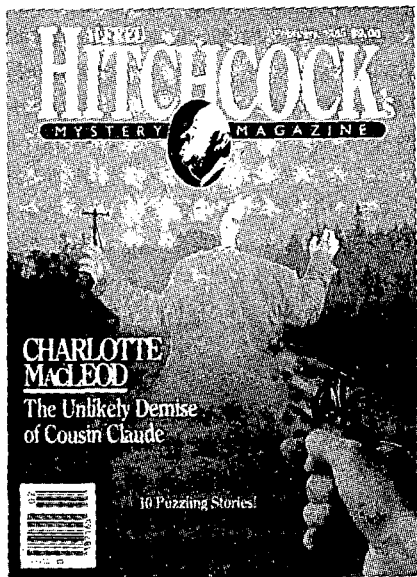
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In this issue . . . Last year about this time we brought you a two-part Mystery Classic by Mark Twain, a story we enjoyed a great deal but that was too long to run in one issue. Now we've come up with another such tale, Richard Harding Davis's "In the Fog," first published in 1901. Each of its three sections contains a story that almost stands alone—but only almost, as the three are also part of a whole, and are woven together at the end. We very much hope you enjoy them—along the way there are some unforgettable scenes and puzzles. Of it, Jacques Barzun and Wendell Hertig Taylor, in *A Catalogue of Crime*, said, "Davis has a style and zest all his own, and the double twist at the end is as good as the wonderful atmosphere at the beginning."

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FICTION

Transcript

by Bill Crenshaw



Illustration by Terry Lee

I want to make a statement. I don't want to wait for a lawyer.

Is this thing turned on?

I want to make a statement about the man who was shot.

I want you to understand up front, I am an MBA from a good school, not Ivy League but solid. I say this to establish my credentials. I have a job and responsibilities. I am not a crazy person.

It all began last night.

(he laughs)

Isn't that crazy? Only last night.

It was raining again, raining still, I should say, like it had all week. I was just coming off a long day. I was at a stoplight. It was almost dark and the streets were all slick with water and the city looked almost pretty, you know how it looks with the lights reflecting off the wet so all you see is lights and not the dirt. So I'm at this light, first in line, and it's, I don't know, eight thirty maybe. I remember I'm tapping my finger on the steering wheel, so I must have the radio on. Then the passenger door opens and someone just gets in the car.

I know I should have had my doors locked.

I was scared. I don't mind admitting that. I'm scared, and I'm aware of being scared all in an instant, even before my head

starts turning to see who's there. I'm expecting some junkie with a gun. What I see is this girl.

I almost wish it had been the junkie.

She locks the door and slides down in the seat and says, "Help me." By now the light is green and the horns behind me have started.

"Lady," I say, "you must get out of my car." Maybe I didn't say that. Maybe I was thinking it. Maybe I said, "What are you doing here?" or something like that. I don't know. But I could see she was scared, and the horns were honking and she was craning to look behind us, so I drove on. I think I saw a couple of guys in the mirror running up toward the intersection as I pulled away. I'm not sure. They must have been there.

I don't know why I drove on. Being the hero, maybe, damsel in distress, all that. Maybe it happened so fast I didn't think, I just acted. My analyst would have a field day. Okay, so I went to an analyst for a while. It was a long time ago. It seems like a long time ago. I was depressed, but who isn't? Mid-life crisis. They make movies and jokes about it. I mean, you get out of school, you do your job, work hard, try to advance, then you look around and you're thirty-five, not married, no kids,

and you have to wonder what's going on. I still don't know what's going on. I'm not depressed about it any more.

Well . . . I just drove off with her. I didn't think about where I was going, I just followed my usual pattern, left here, right there, heading for my apartment. The girl kept looking behind us, but finally she sat up and buckled her seatbelt.

"Thanks," she said, and I didn't know what to say.

"Sure," I said. Then I said, "Where to?" like I was a cabby. It sounded stupid. I hate it when something comes out stupid, but what was I supposed to say?

(pause)

I'm a little nervous. I'm sorry. I'm usually more coherent than this. Could I have a Coke or something?

(pause)

She asked me to take her to Atlanta. I told her I couldn't, I had to be at work the next morning, I didn't even know who she was or what her trouble was.

And as I tell her this I realize that I might have a criminal in my car. Maybe she'd just shot her boyfriend or stolen something, and here I am helping her escape. What's that, an accessory?

So I suggested going to the police, and she said the police

couldn't help her. "They watch the police stations," she said. "That's how they found me last time."

"That's how who found you?" I said, but she just looked away from me out of her window. We stopped at another red light, and I could see that she was soaked right through and shivering. I cut on the heater. I couldn't tell how old she was in the light from the street. I said there was a laundry room at my apartment complex and I could wash and dry her clothes and she could take a warm bath.

She didn't say anything. We just sat there while the light was red. The radio *was* on, I remember there was a song. The light changed and she still didn't say anything.

She could have been anybody. She could have been a runaway. She could have been crazy. What was I supposed to do? She was sitting right there in my car, and she was wet, and I had talked to her. I couldn't just open the door and give her a quick shove with my foot, could I? So I took her home.

I live in Windhills, you know, spread out, every building with only four apartments, and there's a pool and a rec building and all that. I moved in to meet people. No kids or dogs in Windhills.

It's only drizzling by the time

we get there, and as I pull in, my cat jumps up on the hood just like always. It gave me a little start, but it really scared the girl. It took me a minute or two to calm her down.

Inside, she looked twenty-four, twenty-six maybe, thank God. It was all bad enough without her being a minor. She was in a bluejean jacket and skirt. She had long brown hair plastered all over her face and neck, kind of a round face, eyes too small and legs a little thin. She was plain, actually, but fascinating otherwise.

I gave her a towel for her hair but she just stood there holding up her bag between us. She had like a camera bag or a big purse.

I told her I'd put a robe in the bathroom and she could go in and lock the door and throw her clothes out when she was ready. I'd sit on the couch until she did, then I'd go wash her stuff. So we did that. I had to call through the bathroom door to see if I should wash her bra and panties in hot or cold or what. Lucky no one was in the laundry room because I didn't think of hiding her stuff in a pile of mine until I'd already fed the quarters into the machine. I don't know what I'd have said if anyone had seen me.

The laundry took a while, and I realized later that I could

have gone out and gotten us something to eat while it was in the dryer. I folded her stuff as neatly as I could, and I knocked before I unlocked the apartment door so that I wouldn't scare her, but there was no answer except the cat meowing at my voice.

The bathroom door was still closed and the light was on, so I knocked and told her that I'd put her clothes down by the door. No answer. I knocked again and called, and still nothing. I tried the knob and it wasn't locked, and now I didn't know what to do. She could be asleep in there or gone or she could even be dead. Finally I open the door a crack and say, "Excuse me, are you okay," and a voice behind me says, "Fine," and I whirl around and she's standing there in the robe with a long knife in her hand.

She looks a little wild in the eyes. I don't move. I just stand there and she just stands there and my cat is rubbing back and forth across my shins and yowling because it's hungry. She asks where I've been for so long. I say with the wash so it wouldn't get stolen and she could have some privacy. She thinks about it. She looks down at the folded clothes and back at me. Then she says she's sorry but she had to make sure, she thinks she can trust me now.

She put the knife in her bag. I was pretty upset about being treated like that. I didn't say anything, but I was doing her a favor, and I resented being treated like that.

She was more attractive now, with her hair dry and hanging around her face. Her hair was very long and full, with kind of a frizz to it. She changed in the bathroom. When she came out she wasn't wearing the jacket, and I could see that she was pregnant. I guess that surprised me.

I didn't know what had her scared enough to carry around a butcher knife, and I didn't want to know. What I wanted was her the hell and gone and me in front of the TV or working on the ad campaign I had to pitch Friday.

I asked if she was hungry. I thought maybe I could feed her and take her to the bus station and pay her fare to Atlanta just to get rid of her, or maybe the airport, I'd even pay for that.

I said I'd go get some burgers or chicken and then we could decide what to do. She said, no way she'd sit by herself again, she'd go with me. I had the feeling that she wanted to keep her eye on me, but maybe she wanted the company.

We talked a little in the car, about the weather, you know, small talk, and she started loos-

ening up, got less nervous. At least she didn't look around so much. She had a nice voice. I started to like her. We got a box of chicken and big cups of iced tea. We were both so hungry we couldn't stand the smell on the way back so she opened the chicken and handed me a leg and we started in, getting grease all over our fingers and faces and laughing. I'm on my second piece when I pull into the parking lot and the cat jumps up on the hood.

And the girl almost jumps out of her skin again, and I laugh, but she says, "I thought you shut her in the apartment."

And I freeze right there with the chicken leg halfway to my mouth, and when I freeze I go all cold, still and cold, as if that's what freeze meant, and we're sitting there looking at each other with the drizzle running down the windows and making ripply shadows slide down our faces in the blue parking lot light, and then we're both all motion; I'm slamming the gears into reverse and she's buckling up and saying, "They found us, go, go, go!" and I see the cat scramble and fall off the hood as I whip back out of the parking place, and I hope it's not hurt, and I drop it into first and screech out toward the street.

Suddenly there's a guy run-

ning out into my headlights and it looks to me like he's got a gun but I can't be sure, and he's coming from the right, so I cut left to avoid him, and she just reaches out and grabs the wheel and jerks it down toward her and we swing right and we hit the guy.

(pause)

It's... like a big whump when you hit somebody. I saw him go down all lit up in the headlights, and then we bounced twice as we got him with the front tire and the rear tire. He knew what was happening to him. You could see it in his face when he went down.

I slammed on the brakes and looked back. I could see a shape on the pavement, and I could see three guys running out of my apartment building.

"They're coming," I hear the girl say, and I see them in slow motion. Then she slaps me hard across the face and says, "They're coming, go, go!" and that brings me out of it, and I go. When we get to the street at the top of the hill, I can see a car swinging around in the lot and heading up after us.

I drove like hell, almost got creamed when I ran the first light but I wasn't going to stop. The adrenaline was making my leg shake and when I got to Beltline I was mad and scared both. I was screaming at her.

"You made me run over that man," I was screaming. "He might be dead."

She was turning in her seat looking behind us. "There they are," she said, and in the mirror I see a dark blue or black something slide around the corner. I speed up and almost rear-end the guy in front of me: I cut left just in time. I asked her what they wanted. She didn't answer. I look over at her and I get really mad and I backhand her across her shoulder and yell, "What do they want?" and she yells back that they want to kill her and to watch out, and I barely miss this car making a sudden left.

I pulled back to the center lane and sped up. She told me that she could still see them. Ahead I see six lanes of traffic, all those cars full of people going to the movies or bars or home, and here I was speeding and weaving and running red lights with some pregnant woman who claimed that people were trying to kill her. "This is crazy," I said, and I was talking mostly to myself. "This is insane." She just kept looking behind us.

I didn't know if they were back there or not. I didn't know what kind of car it was. It was blue. It looked like half the cars on the road. They're in this generic car and I'm in a bone-white

BMW. I might as well have neon on the roof.

She tells me they're gaining and I see a major intersection coming up and the light going to yellow. It was Harper or Broad, not some little two-lane back into suburbia but six lanes of its own. It'll be red before I get there, I can see that, but she says I can't stop, and in her voice I can hear she means it. I floor it. The light goes red. Cars start into the intersection and I sit on my horn, but I can see there's no way I'm going to make it.

I hit a car on the right front and spin it around, and we're swerving toward a tractor-trailer across the yellow lines but I manage to swing back and somehow we're still going. The car we hit was a little subcompact. I hope they're okay. She's still looking back, but I can see a smile now. The intersection is blocked, so whoever's after us is caught until he can bull his way through. I don't slow down.

Then up ahead in my lane I see a cop. "Thank God," I say, "a cop," and I turn on my blinkers and start honking even though he's way on up, and suddenly this girl is screaming that I can't stop and she's pulling my arm so I can't blow the horn. I push her away and she starts clawing and scratching so I give her a real shove and

she bangs her head on her window. I keep her stiff-armed away from me and say, "I don't know what the hell is going on here, but I'm out. The cops can take over now."

"If you stop him, they'll kill him," she says. "Then they'll kill you."

"What do you mean, they'll kill me?" I say. "What does that mean?"

"It doesn't matter to them."

The cop was signaling a left turn. The intersection behind us was clearing. I was gaining on the cop. "If he pulls you," she said, "he's dead and you're dead."

"And you're dead," I said. I hated her then.

"Eventually," she said. "Slow down."

I slowed. The cop did a U-turn and headed back our way, maybe toward the wreck, and I kept expecting his blue light to come on, hoping it would and afraid it would, but he went right on by. "There they are," she said, and I sped up again.

I was ahead, but Beltline is wide and lit like daytime and they could see me a half a mile away. I had to get off Beltline. We dodged through a knot of traffic on a curve and when they hit the knot and couldn't see us I braked and made a hard right down a two-lane into a residential area, took the first left, then first right after that,

figuring to lose them in the maze. Only the street we were on was one of those little cul-de-sacs that ends in a big circle in front of four or five houses. No through traffic. The entrance is the exit. Terrific, I think.

I swung almost all the way around the circle, then pulled over and parked. I turned off the lights and motor and we slumped down in the seats. If they came down the street, we could get out before they could turn around, but I wasn't moving until I had to.

(pause, laugh)

This must sound absolutely nuts. It sounds nuts to me, and I was there.

That's what I was thinking as I sat there trying to look out between the steering wheel and the dash. Nuts, nightmare. I mean, what the hell, you know? What the hell?

I don't think I asked her who they were. Maybe I did. But I think she just started talking. "They're from my husband," she says, and her voice is flat and dead because we're all hunched down in the seats with our heads bent forward. "I thought I was to be an eastern Mrs. Simpson, a sort of arid Princess Grace," she says. I know who Princess Grace was. I ask her what in the blue hell she's talking about.

She looks over at me in the dim light. "I met him in graduate school," she said. "Swept off my feet, carried away, head over heels. A prince from a really truly live place, the romantic East, between Carthage and Cathay. Unimaginable." She smiled in a kind of far-off way. I know by now she really is crazy. Then she looks at me like she sees me in focus. "He looks something like you, actually. Tall, dark, leaf-brown eyes, glasses that shrink your face so that I can see right past your ears in the lenses if I look at you head on. Same three-piece suit, same hands, thin hands and fingers. He's a bit darker, hairline a bit lower, maybe. And he's got a mustache like a pushbroom. You've never had a mustache, have you?"

I told her I had, but it was a lie.

"Well, he kept his. It had no sinister connotations from one-reel westerns and Hoover's dress code. Maybe it should have. He's had it since puberty, I'll bet. He's had a lot of things since puberty." She's not talking to me any more. She's drifting away.

"Just what the hell is going on here?" I say for the hundredth time.

Her eyes focus on me again. "I wanted a divorce. The cus-

toms of my husband's culture do not allow the wife—or any of the wives, as it turns out—that prerogative, with one exception—historically, death was the acceptable form of divorce. However, my husband is anxious for his country to enter the twentieth century, and in deference to modernity, a hysterectomy is substituted for death. One ceases to be a woman, you see, and therefore ceases to be, in any meaningful way, alive.”

I just look at her.

“For reasons I don’t care to discuss, I found that option acceptable. I stipulated, however, an American doctor in an American hospital. My husband agreed. A large entourage made the crossing, eager to suck at America’s juices again. In the hospital I discovered my pregnancy. I would not have an abortion. I could not, even had I wanted. The child, you see, is sacred. He can trace his lineage to before the fall of Troy.” Then she smiles again.

What would you do? She’s got a butcher knife. She’s clearly crazy. But somebody’s after her, and now me. Maybe they’re from a mental hospital. That would make sense, wouldn’t it? That she’s escaped and they’re trying to get her back for her own protection? So maybe I should flag them down and do

us all a favor.

But what if they really are trying to kill her? Not for why she says because that’s clearly paranoid. Maybe the real reason has driven her insane and so she’s in this fantasy. But if I flag them down, they might really kill her.

But maybe I should flag them down anyway. That’s what I find myself thinking. But then, I think, maybe if I do, maybe they’ll kill me, too.

“I escaped from the hospital,” she said. “I went to the police. They didn’t believe me, of course. They called my husband. I heard the sergeant call the foreign mission. I went to the powder room. I took a powder.” She giggled when she said that.

“You’re saying your husband wants this baby?”

“It is sacred to him,” she said.

“And he’s rich, right? He can give the kid anything and the kid will grow up and be king or whatever? Why don’t you just go back and live in your little fairy tale and be a good wife and mother?”

“Oh, I couldn’t do that,” she said. “That right is forfeit. I have asked for a divorce. I have run away. I am still the wife, to be sure, and you could die simply for looking at me, much less steaming up the windows in your car with me. But I am also already dead. While I carry

this sacred child, I am a sacred vessel. As soon as the child is born—in their wailing room, with their midwives—they will perform their hysterectomy, *sans* surgeon, *sans* anesthesia, *sans* all. If I die as a result—well, that's in the hands of God, isn't it?"

I didn't say anything.

"You don't believe a word of this," she said, and she smiled. Then she sat up a little and looked out. "They may have more than one car out by now."

Which was not news I wanted to hear. I sat up to see out better. It was raining hard again. After a while some lights start coming down the street, and I slide back down, hoping they turn into a driveway, but they just keep crawling toward us, coming too slow. I couldn't take it.

"Buckle up," I said, and I started the engine. The car was thirty, forty yards away. I didn't cut on the lights, hoping they wouldn't see us right away, and I drove slow at first, like I was a resident, but they saw us and pulled across both lanes, and I ran up over the sidewalk and across somebody's front yard to get around. I took out one of those decorative lampposts. Lost the right front light, I realized later. No, we lost that when we hit the subcompact.

She was right, though. It

wasn't the same car. It only had two guys. The blue car had three.

They were still turning around by the time I hit the stop sign. I turned back left, and left again, and took off.

You know, sometimes late at night you'll hear these cars go screaming through your neighborhood. Maybe they wake you up, and maybe you curse them for jerks and turn over and go back to sleep. You never think what might be going on out there, and you wouldn't imagine it if you did, that somebody out there might be running for his life.

We went roaring through that neighborhood past all these houses and yards, with the streets almost too narrow because of the parked cars. I kept weaving a little so they couldn't pass. They got close but couldn't come around. I wondered why they didn't shoot and if they had guns. She said they wouldn't shoot because of her. "Unless they have a clear shot at you with no danger to me," she said. "Great," I said.

But then the neighborhood started getting better and we started getting into trouble because the houses got bigger and the streets got wider and there were more garages and fewer cars on the street. I couldn't turn off because if I slowed

down to turn, they'd be on me, so this whole chase has been one long straight shot, and now it's changing. I'm still weaving but they get by me and are pulling alongside. I can definitely see two guys, and I see the flash of a gunshot. I slam on the brakes and get lucky because I can whip around a corner without stopping, but they overshoot and have to back up before they can follow.

I yelled that I thought she said they wouldn't shoot at me. She said they were trying for the engine.

They were gaining again.

I wanted to get back to the crowded neighborhood, so I made another hard left, but they got by and came up beside me again. One of them was leaning out the window and I could see a strange face with a mustache lit from the left, then the top, then the right as we went under a light. It looked like a Halloween mask almost, something not right. He was aiming for a tire. It's an intense kind of moment, you're right on top of everything, every detail, every instant. They couldn't have been beside me for more than a second.

Then she says, "Run him off," and I tap my brakes and cut hard left and hit him just behind the rear tire, my strong point on his weak. The impact

sends us both to the left, right up against the curb, and there's a parked car coming up on us fast like it's moving itself, and we're going to plow right into it. That intensity . . .

I cut hard right and he goes left and down into somebody's yard, fishtailing across the grass. I can't keep it in the street and we go through a hedge before I can bring it back. We lost the other headlight somewhere in it all and the car didn't feel right, but we were in the street and going, and we could see the other car churning up mud in what was probably a very nice lawn.

We were ahead for sure now, and we started laughing and I was pounding the wheel. We got maybe ten blocks before the temperature light came on.

I didn't want to pull over, but I couldn't take a chance on the engine seizing up, so I pulled over and she started in on me again and she didn't shut up until I showed her the holes in the radiator and the steam rising up in the rain. She started pulling at me, saying we had to get away from the car. I couldn't believe what the car looked like. It wasn't even six months old.

Beltline was just a few blocks up, so I took her by the elbow and started up the street, thinking I'd find a pay phone

and call a cab, but then I said, "What the hell," and turned up the nearest walk toward somebody's front door. Then she really freaked and grabbed my arm and tried to drag me back. I shook her off and told her that I was going to call a cab. We looked like hell, but I didn't care. I got out of the rain on the front porch and straightened my coat and rang the bell. I was leaving a big puddle where I stood and she was screaming at me in the rain.

"You just shut up," I said. "I'm calling a damn cab."

She said a car was coming.

I ring the bell again and beat on the door with my fist and the porch light comes on, so I try to look normal, but she's still yelling about the car. I hear somebody turning the locks inside and I smooth my hair back, I can see the lights down the block now and they're coming slow again, but the door is opening. I try to smile, but then she just takes off like a rabbit for the back yard and then I'm in the rain running after her and I don't even know why.

She's way ahead of me, I can see her all the way to the cyclone fence at the back of the yard, and suddenly I'm on my back with her bending over me and the rain coming down in my face. I caught a clothesline right across the neck in the

dark. You can still see the mark on my neck, so I know I was there. My glasses were gone. She found my glasses and helped me under the roof of a tool shed out of the rain so I could breathe and get my throat working again. But somebody cuts on a back yard light and starts yelling, so we go over the fence at the back. I'm still not breathing right and my throat feels like a fist on fire is in it and I rip my suit on one of those sharp points on top of the fence. I cut my hand, too.

I thought we'd go straight across the block, you know, out of this yard, across the street, into another yard, cross the blocks like that. But we'd be in the open every time we crossed a street, so I decided to work up toward Beltline in this block, from one back yard to the next, staying away from the street.

You wouldn't believe the crap in back yards. Maybe the rain and the dark made it worse. Tricycles, barbecue grills, swing sets, sandboxes, a woodpile. She fell off the woodpile, but she was okay. I tripped on a croquet wicket and knocked my breath out again. I took a croquet mallet with me and two balls in my coat pockets. There were a lot of fences.

Near the end of the block was this eight foot wooden fence, but the posts and crossties or

whatever were on our side, so I could climb up and help her up and lower her down easy, but our hands were wet and she slipped out of my grip and twisted her ankle. So we rested against the fence in the rain for a while.

The fence on the other side of the yard was a high brick wall. We'd have to cross the street and work our way up the next block. Her ankle still hurt, but she could make it if I got an arm under her. We watched a long time for slow cars, then went straight across the street and down a driveway and through a gate into the back yard.

And then in the rain I hear a chain rattle and I hear a deep growl and a Doberman is snarling and then he's charging and the girl is falling down on my left because I let her go and I hear the croquet mallet whistling through the air as I swing it down in this perfect arc at exactly the right place and exactly the right time and the whistling stops and the snarling stops together with a crack when the mallet smacks down right between that Dobie's eyes and the handle breaks. Then there's maybe a second of total silence except for the hissing of the rain and the different plinks the drops make as they hit different things. Then all the dogs for a mile around start barking,

and I get her up and we run back to the street and just run.

We ran a block and a half before her ankle really got to her again. There was this huge magnolia with branches all the way to the ground. We got up under it and sat on a branch next to the trunk. It smelled all green from the crushed magnolia leaves. Dogs were still barking.

It was a good hiding place. I could see the street between the leaves but nobody in a car could see me even looking right at me. Lots of cars went by, but all at normal speed. We sat for maybe five minutes just catching our breath. Then I see a police car, and I tell her I'm going to flag it down because the guys chasing us aren't around now.

"They have scanners," she says. "They would know the instant he radios in."

I just stare at her. I don't believe this.

"They also have walkie-talkies," she says then.

The patrol car passes us and is gone. I feel like a sailor on an island watching a ship sail by. I feel ridiculous. "Don't these guys know," I ask her, "that they just can't kill me to get you? If we're with cops, they'll be arrested if they try, or killed, which has my vote. That's nuts. They won't try anything."

But she's shaking her head

and smiling, I can see her smiling in that dappled light from the street. She said they had protection, physical and metaphysical immunity, she called it. She said they had diplomatic immunity from the embassy, and spiritual immunity because if they died in service to her husband they'd have special rewards in heaven or the next life or whatever they do. How do you answer something like that?

A block and a half up I can see the blue-white glow of Beltline beyond silhouettes of trees and houses. The only thing I can think of is to get to a pay phone by myself, to leave her in the tree. Without her, they might not recognize me. That way I had a chance. I'd call a cab and we'd pick her up. "Unless they've got a scanner for cabs," I said. "They don't, do they?" She said she didn't think so. I was only joking. I didn't think there was such a thing, but now I didn't know. I told her to stay put and I left.

I was almost a block away when I heard her scream. I ran back. I could see a car and see her twisting in the grip of somebody who had her from behind, who had something over her mouth and was dragging her to the car. I don't know how he found her. Maybe he saw me leave the tree, or maybe she

came out even though she knew better and he saw her as he was cruising by without lights. I don't know. And I didn't know what I was going to do, I was just charging.

I was a couple of driveways away when I saw the gun coming up. I dropped like a sack of cement and he must have thought I was hit. What with her twisting and fighting, it would have been a miracle if he had hit anywhere near me. The shot gets all the dogs barking again, and when I look up, she's on the ground and he's bending over her with his back three quarters to me; he's dragging her toward the car. I reach into my pocket for a croquet ball and I get up, and he sees the motion and turns toward me, pulling out that gun again, but the croquet ball is already in the air and it catches him just behind his right ear, and he goes straight down. Great shot. His gun is beside him. I pick it up.

When I knelt down beside her, she put her arms around my neck and buried her head in my shoulder. She didn't cry, and she didn't stay long, she just held me like that for a second. Then I heard a noise in the car and I jerked up the gun and almost fired. It was a walkie-talkie. I couldn't understand it, but knew what it meant. Our man stretched out on the side-

walk there had probably radioed his buddies when he found us, and they were on their way. We didn't have much time. I helped her into the car and put the gun in my lap and we took off.

I can't tell you how good it felt to have that car. I was tired, and sick of being wet, of smelling like a wet dog, and we were both cut and bruised and god-awful filthy and cold, but we had the heat on high and we were happy. We were mobile again. We could go anywhere.

I wanted to get out of town altogether, and Beltline was the obvious way to the interstate, so I headed away from Beltline. I figured that these guys didn't know the city. They knew Beltline, and maybe some other main arteries, and that's where they'd seen us and where my BMW was pointing, so I'd let them play hide and seek around Beltline while I'd go down into Stoney Creek Park and cut straight through past the ballfields and the playground and the zoo and pick up the interstate on the other side. It was a great plan. But when we crossed this intersection, there was the blue car at the stop sign.

They turned after us and started flashing their lights. The walkie-talkie started chattering. They were looking for

their buddy. We didn't answer. They started speeding up. They knew who we were now.

If I had been in the passenger seat, I might have leaned out and taken a shot, but I didn't give her the gun. I didn't want her to hold the gun, for some reason.

I thought we'd be okay if I could keep ahead until we made the park. On a straight stretch or Beltline, we were in trouble, but I knew the park's twists and turns, and I could lose them there, whip around a curve and down a side road and be gone.

We had a pretty good lead when we turned down into the park, and we were almost out of sight of the main road when they turned in. A couple of seconds more and they never would have seen us and I wouldn't be here now.

We were ahead, but it was raining harder than ever, and water was standing on the roads, so I couldn't go fast. We headed down into the park, me leaning over the steering wheel trying to see ahead while she twisted back in her seat to watch behind. The windows kept fogging. We'd go around a curve and all I could hear was the engine and the wipers and the water hissing under the tires and my breathing and hers, and then she'd say, "There they are," and I'd try to go faster.

But the lower we got in the park, the more water stood in the roads, and when I glanced to my left I saw the ballfields were flooded like always when Stoney Creek tried to soak up all that runoff from city pavement. But then I realized that flooded roads might be good because I knew them well enough to stay on them, but our buddies might miss a turn and end up in the mud or maybe even the creek itself. In a couple of curves it was all water, more than I wanted, but there was nothing else to do but guide by the guard rail on the right and go on.

Finally I round a curve and see a straight shot ahead to the Hardin Street tunnel, and I speed up. A block beyond the tunnel we can turn up to the interstate. But the road is still going down and the water is still coming up, and when we hit the tunnel we send this big sheet of spray in front of us and the car stalls dead and won't start. I open my door and the water just pours in and when we get out it's midway up my thighs and flowing like a river back the way we came, back toward where our friends are coming from.

I grab her hand and we try to go against the flow, but it's not easy and the water is full of garbage, and I think it's ris-

ing, and we get almost nowhere when there's a loud noise and the blue car crashes into all that water and stalls out.

The tunnel is dim, three or four bulbs in little wire cages, but I can see the three guys in the car clear enough, see the driver say something into a walkie-talkie before he gets out and climbs up on his hood and orders his two buddies to get us. We're huddled together trying to back away as they start for us. They've got guns.

I have my gun out now and I yell at them to stay back or I'll kill them, but they just keep coming, pushing against the flow, moving slowly in the water, their arms out a little from their sides like they're balancing, and the guy on the hood standing spread-legged with his gun in both hands aimed my way. If she hadn't been between us, he could have shot me, and the others are moving closer for a clean shot, and if I move to get a shot at one, another can get me. A beer can in the water hits the one to my right in the crotch and spins around him and down the tunnel. He keeps coming. They both keep coming. There's nothing I can do.

The girl is right in front of me, and I reach up and grab her hair and pull her head back and put the muzzle of my gun to her

temple. I yell that if they take one more step I'll kill her. They keep coming like they don't understand.

"I mean it," I yell, and I pull back on her hair harder, exposing more throat, and she makes a little moan and rolls her eyes back at me, white all around the blue, but she doesn't struggle. She knows I mean it. They know. They stop. The water's flowing past and rising and we're like statues in a fountain, frozen in that sick yellow light. They just stand there. There's nothing they can do.

I take the gun off her temple and aim it at the nearest one and he still just stands there with the water climbing toward his belt. So I just shoot him, bang, and he sinks down into the water and I put the gun back on her temple and pull her head back. Nobody moves. I thought one would do something, but they just stand there. So I aim at the one on the hood who's still aiming at me and bang he drops down to the hood with a crash, and then I shoot the last one. The last one takes two shots. He just stands there holding his shoulder and waits for the second one. Then he sinks down in the water and he's gone.

(pause)

I just stand there breathing hard for a while, maybe a long

while. My heart is hammering and breathing is hard. I stand there until I hear her ask me to let her up. I realize then that I've still got her all twisted over with my fingers all tangled in her long brown hair. I help her straighten up and we hold on to the car. The water is almost up to my waist. We move now, we go with the flow, back the way we came. At the blue car she tries to get the gun on the hood, but it is out of her reach. I give her mine and get the one on the hood for me. She puts hers in that big bag, which is now partway under water. Then she says to the guy on the hood, "Finally a hero," and then she grabs him by his hair and braces on the fender and drags him down into the water. "But it's a long, long way to Carthage and Cathay," she says to the corpse as it turns and sinks. It seems as real as anything else.

We got out of the tunnel and went straight up the embankment to Hardin Street. It was slippery, but there were shrubs, azalea, and laurel, maybe, and we pulled up from bush to bush. We knew the driver had radioed somebody. We didn't know where he'd be coming from, but it couldn't be Hardin, no access from Hardin. It was a climb. We made it to the top and just lay there in the rain, letting the mud wash off.

On Hardin Street you'd never know that anything had happened. It was the usual after-midnight traffic and wet pavement and that was it. I looked back down toward the tunnel and all that carnage, but I couldn't see anything. It could have been another planet. It didn't make any sense.

I could see an all-night doughnut place a couple of blocks up. Hardin Street won't be safe forever, maybe, and I want a cab out of there. So we cross to the darker side and stay in what shadows we can all the way up. The doughnut place is on the corner. I don't like intersections, so we check it out real well before we cross.

It's all white light inside the doughnut place, and if she's in there and they pass by on the street, they'd see her for sure, so I tell her to wait while I go in and get change and use the phone. She stands under the awning of an insurance company next door, just out of the light.

Nobody comments on my clothes. Everybody just looks at his doughnut or his coffee or his cigarette right in front of him, which suits me. I get change and call a cab, and as a surprise I get two big steaming cups of coffee and a jelly doughnut each, but as I'm paying I look out and see her running into the inter-

section and climbing into this white 240Z that's stopped at the red light.

I run out but I'm too late. I'm standing in the middle of the street watching the car speed away. I can see her face looking back at me, just a white circle in the back window, and I can see the dark shape of the driver's head, and my gun is in my hand and I sight down on that car and I swear I take a shot at that driver almost.

(long pause)

It took me a long time to get back to my apartment. At first I was furious she had done that to me, run off and left me there buying coffee and doughnuts for her. But then I was relieved she was gone, glad. Whatever this was, it was over at last, and I could put things back together. But then I got scared that she wasn't there. I didn't have any protection any more. I only had the gun, and I wasn't sure that was enough.

I didn't take the cab when it showed up. I was already headed out on foot a couple of blocks over, working my way back to my apartment on little back streets, quiet neighborhoods. I ducked into bushes or shadows every time a car came by.

I was the last one to see her. I was the only link they had. I might still be. They might be looking for me now.

I got home about dawn, but I watched the apartment for a long time before I went in. I studied the parking lot for cars that didn't belong. Finally I went in my building and up the stairs, creeping like a thief. Nobody and nothing. I unlocked the door carefully and stood to one side while I opened it. Nothing. So I eased around the door frame with my gun out.

I don't know what I expected to find. Everything looked normal. Then I saw the cat lying on the living room rug. It never did that. I thought it must be dead. But I knelt beside it and saw breathing. Then I thought maybe it was hurt from falling off my car last night, and then I realized it couldn't have gotten back in by itself, and then somebody behind me says something. I whirl around and

see this guy with a big mustache in the hall looking in and smiling. I shoot him until he goes backwards over the rail and I can't see him any more. Then I just squat there watching the door until you guys come.

That's how the man got shot.

And now you tell me that he was a new tenant, but that doesn't mean he wasn't one of them. And now you say there were no bodies in the park. Maybe they got washed away, or maybe they picked them up. I don't know. I've told you everything I know.

(pause)

I don't have anything else to say.

(pause)

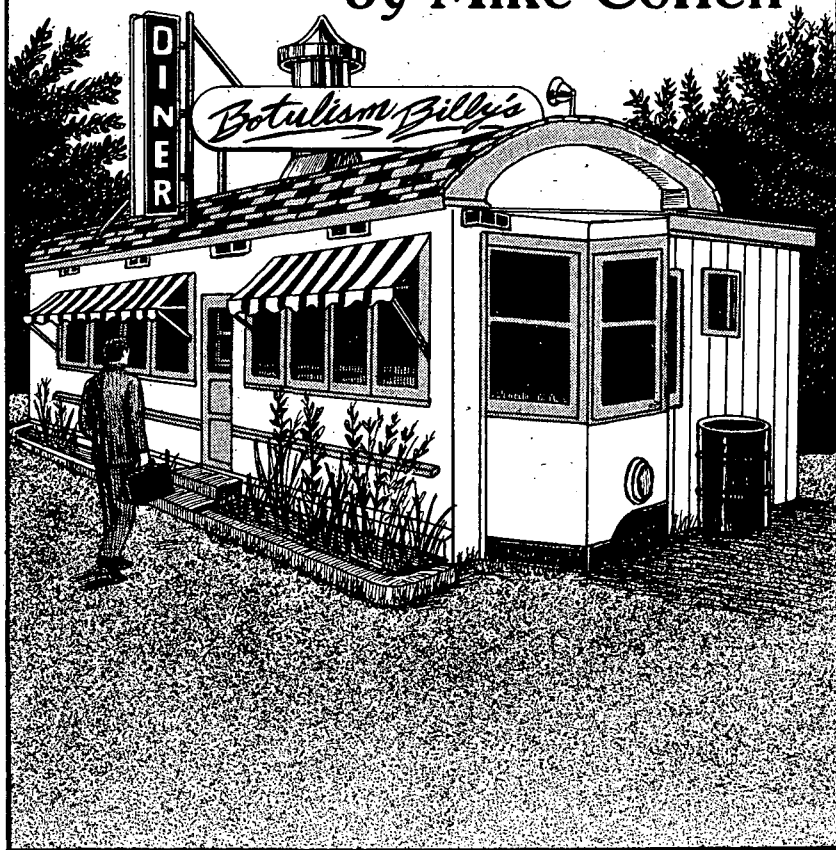
I think I want a lawyer now.

(pause)

Will somebody turn this thing off?

Keep the Home Fries Burning

by Mike Cohen



When a man comes into a restaurant and doesn't look hungry, watch out. I stopped polishing the coffee urn and watched as he took a shortcut in and out of the tables and chairs across the room toward me.

Our Formica counter was chipped and scarred with cigarette burns, and the vinyl on the stools was scuffed and stained. So when, arriving, he made no move to sit at the counter, I accepted the blame on behalf of the house and offered him something better. It was three o'clock in the afternoon and the place was empty; he could sit anywhere he wanted.

"Would you like a table, sir?" I asked in my voice of professional courtesy.

He shook his head. His dark blue suit was carefully pressed. He had a sharp and shiny nose and sincere jaw freshly shaved.

"A booth?" I said.

"I'm not here to eat," he said.

It figured.

What didn't figure was what he *was* there for. He had an attaché case but unless he opened it, that wasn't going to tell me much; the clues were all inside.

"Are you Mr. William Krowlie?" he asked. He laid the case on the counter between us.

"No, I'm not," I said.

He put a protective hand on the attaché case. "Mr. Krowlie

is the proprietor of this restaurant," he said. It was a question. "This is where he can be found." That was another question.

"Billy's upstairs," I said. I was going to add "sleeping" to my report on Billy's condition but what for? Billy was my boss, he could sleep if he wanted to, the whole world didn't have to know.

The man laid a business card on the counter. That told me something: his name was Lionel Marley. Under the name was an address in Miami, Florida, and then in smaller letters it said: ATTORNEY-AT-LAW. Aha!

"What's this all about?" I said.

He told me what I already knew: "I would like to see Mr. William Krowlie." He lifted his chin and the overhead light reflected off the top of his slicked yellow hair. His words were polite enough but the words he wasn't using were telling me in no uncertain terms: none of your business, flunky.

"Wait here," I said. I could be curt, too. He wasn't buying anything, I didn't need to be polite; I didn't even need to fake it. I went upstairs, opened the bedroom door, and jabbed Billy's shoulder. "There's a guy downstairs to see you," I said.

Billy was thirty or so, about my age. He wasn't much to look

at when he was fully awake, but he could be ugly as hell half asleep. Like right now. "Can't you see I'm taking a nap?" he growled.

"This guy's a lawyer."

That woke him a little more.

"What's he want?"

"He wants to see you."

"About what?"

"He didn't say."

"Whyn't you ask?"

"I did. He still wouldn't say."

"What's he look like?"

"Neat. College. Polite. Gentleman fink."

Billy forced his feet to the floor, scratched his butt, stood up. He was shorter than I, heavier, nastier. "Why a fink?"

"I don't like him."

Billy pulled on a pair of shoes. He studied the dresser mirror, picked up a brush, gave his curly black hair a couple of useless wallops, examined the mirror again, rewarded himself with an indulgent smile. "You can't stand the guy," Billy said, "because he's a lawyer and you're not. If you'd finished college, maybe you'd like him better."

"I couldn't afford to finish college."

"So you got a job in a restaurant. You figure this'll make you rich?"

"You own the place. You tell me."

Billy laughed. "Don't count on it."

Lionel Marley, Attorney-at-Law, was still standing there when we came down. He shook Billy's hand, started to open his bag, then looked at me. "Could we talk privately?" he said to Billy.

Billy gave me the eye and a jerk of his head.

I know when I'm not wanted. I left.

I went out to the kitchen and helped Sam cut up the lettuce for tonight's salad bar. I sliced green peppers, onions, and mushrooms. Every once in a while I went to the swinging doors and looked out one of the oval windows to see if a customer, maybe some nut on tip-toes—you know—had sneaked in and was looking for service. And there they were, Billy and Lionel Marley, still sitting at a table where they could catch the light from the window, a litter of papers spread out between them, and this guy Marley very serious looking, all business, and Billy grinning like an infant with a fistful of lollipops. I tried to hear what they were saying but fat chance.

It was a little after four o'clock when Marley left. I caught Billy before he could gather the papers the guy had left him. I stood there trying to read the stuff sideways, straightways, and upside down. "What's going on?" I said.

"None of your business."

"You can't talk to me that way; you owe me three months' back pay, I'm practically your partner."

Billy stacked his papers in a single pile and I read a name on the top one, very official looking with a pasted-on gold seal. "Who's Seth Krowlie?" I said.

Billy laughed to himself, a little private joke. Then he decided to share it with me. "Santa Claus," he said.

"There ain't no Santa Claus."

"Oh yes there is." Billy was having his kind of fun. "What there ain't is a Seth Krowlie. There used to be but now there ain't. Seth Krowlie's dead. So sad. Come on, pal, squeeze out a tear for poor old Uncle Seth."

"Are you telling me what I think you're telling me?"

"I sure am. I'm doing it like the man says, I'm making money the old fashioned way: inheriting it."

"That's terrific, Billy." I was thinking ahead: somehow there had to be something in this for me. "How much is it?"

"A lot."

"How big a lot?"

"Six figures."

I figured fast, all the fingers on one hand and the thumb of the other. "That's a hundred thousand dollars," I said.

"At least," he said.

"Great! Maybe now you can make up my back pay."

"Well, sure," he said.

"When?"

"Hey, not so fast. It'll take a little while. They don't just walk in and give you a lot of money. There are procedures and technicalities."

I knew it was too good to be true.

"Are you saying I won't be getting my money?"

"Hey, what do you think I am, a crook?"

What could I say? I wouldn't say yes and I couldn't say no. "All I know is I've been managing this restaurant for you and you owe me money and I want it."

"You'll get it."

"When?"

"When I get mine." He stopped, let a sly grin cover his face. "Hey, you said before you were like my partner, right?"

"That's what I said."

"What if we make it official? In consideration of the back pay I owe you, I'll make you half owner of this establishment."

I didn't hesitate a second. What the hell, I really didn't figure to get the money anyway; a partnership was better than nothing. "Put it in writing," I said.

"Don't you trust me?"

"I trust writing."

"All right, all right."

"Partners, effective immediately."

"No."

"What do you mean no?"

"Not immediately."

"Then when?"

"I only owe you three months' pay. I don't want a partner right away. Today is August 15th. Let's say effective November 15th, businesslike, then you'll be a full partner."

I was suspicious. "Why do you need all that time? What've you got in mind?"

Billy picked up his pile of papers and stood up. "Why don't you wait and see?"

"What about my partnership?"

"Will you make up your mind? You want it or don't you?"

"I want it."

"Okay." He sat down again. He stuck a sheet of carbon paper in a pad and wrote it out in duplicate, a copy for him, a copy for me. We both signed. Sam came out of the kitchen and witnessed. He signed, too. Maybe it wasn't legal but maybe it was; it was better than just Billy's word. I felt good.

But I didn't feel good long.

The men from Sigma Sign Company drove their truck up to our front door. They took down the old sign and put a new bigger one across the whole front of the

building. We were no longer Billy's Eatery. Now we were—if I could believe my eyes which at that moment was impossible—Botulism Billy's. I ran inside to check the dictionary and make sure but we didn't have a dictionary so I looked in the phone book and called the Board of Health and they confirmed it meant what I thought it meant and they asked me next who this was calling, please. So I hung up.

Billy showed up at four o'clock with a stack of newly-printed menus, and even though I'd seen the name on the outside sign, the shock hit me all over again when I saw it on the front of those nice new gold colored folders: "Botulism Billy's—Bill of Fare."

"What the hell you trying to do, ruin the place?" I hollered.

"This place doesn't need to be ruined; it never was any good. So I'm just paying my respects, finishing it off, letting it go with a worthy bang. Now that I'm rich, it's the least I can do."

"Maybe you're rich but I'm not. By the time I get to be an owner, there'll be nothing left to own."

He grinned like that was the whole idea.

I started to walk away but he stopped me. "Hey, you haven't seen the best part," he said.

"You mean there's more?"

He handed me one of the new menus. "Read inside."

"I'll bet." I threw it on the counter.

But he picked it up again and gave it back to me. "Look at it. Read it."

Reluctantly I opened the folder and read his introduction on page one. "That's a nice blurb you gave Sam," I said.

"I figured he'd like it."

"What the hell is a chef Cordon Blah?"

"Exactly," Billy said, pleased.

"And Gangrene Salad. That's a nice touch. Hey, Billy, you have to excuse my lack of sophistication but what do we give them in case someone orders Paté de Fake Gras?"

"That's the stuff that gets mowed off artificial football turf."

By now I was madder than a stepped-on snake. All my assets were as good as gone; I'd put my three months' back pay on a sinking ship. I saw he'd changed Potatoes au Gratin to Potatoes Ugh Rotten and our pie selection now consisted of Apple, Cherry, and Pekinese. The daily Stomach Pump Special was Hambugs and for the seafood lover in you, we were offering Baked Salmonella.

I couldn't believe it. Maybe he'd had just the one phony menu printed up special to tease me. The rest had to be on the

level. I grabbed a handful, flipped through them; they were all alike. Whether I believed it or not, the worst was true.

"So what do you think?" Billy said at last.

"It's great, just great."

"You *like* it?" Billy squeezed his face into a ratlike grimace. I could see he was trying to figure if I was sincere. Was this my boss? Was this the man I'd hoped to have as my business partner? How did I turn out to be so stupid? Where had my mother gone wrong?

"I like it all but the name," I said.

"You got a better idea?"

I threw my handful of menus on the counter. "Cafe Titanic," I yelled over my shoulder. I kicked a chair out of my way and walked out.

The woman was in her early twenties and her hair hadn't been combed since she was fifteen. She was skinny and her dress was too big and it was decorated with a paisley print in a mélange of sickening colors. She had a man with her, a little older, a little sloppier. The man carried a camera. She told me her name was Tina; she didn't introduce the man. They were from the *Eagle* and they were enchanted, she said, by what they'd heard about my restau-

rant. They understood I'd inherited a lot of money and they were there to do a human interest story for their paper and their editor was sure it would really entertain their readers. She ran out of breath, took a deep inhale, began again: "How much money did you inherit?"

"Three months' back pay."

She accommodated me with an unamused laugh. "I'd heard it was over a million—" she prompted.

I noticed her associate was setting up his camera. "Oh, *that* inheritor," I said. "That's not me. That's Krowlie. Billy Krowlie. He's not here now."

She gave me a frown of disgust for wasting her time. The photographer took his focus off me, looked at the woman. She shrugged. "You could get some pictures of the place," she told him. "That outside sign—"

"Also," I said, "you're off on the amount of Billy's inheritance."

"How much?"

"You missed it by nine hundred thousand."

"He inherited a million, nine? Almost two million?"

"By your kind of reverse math, you'd be about right," I said. "Right on the nose." Did you ever wonder why newspapers get everything wrong? They talk to guys like me.

She sidled up to the cashier's

desk, picked a menu off the pile, flipped through it, moving her lips and mumbling. "Chocolate Mouse, Horse's Aspic; our homemade bread is the staph of life." She closed the menu. "What kind of people eat here?"

"No one. It's a going-out-of-business sale."

She waved the folder. "Can I take this with me?"

"Do me a favor," I said. "Take them all with you."

She thanked me. "One's enough."

Tina and her photographer were back the next day and they caught Billy for a two hour interview and a lot of pictures. The story got a big spread in the *Sunday Eagle* and Monday the fun started. All the curiosity seekers had to see what this freak restaurant looked like so they could fill their letters to out-of-town friends with derogatory remarks about the human race.

A guy came in offering to sell a map to the Lost Dutchman Mine, and we had encyclopedia salesmen and condominium and auto salesmen. A guy with a hard luck story about his mother being evicted asked me for five hundred dollars. I told him I wasn't Krowlie and urged him to try again later.

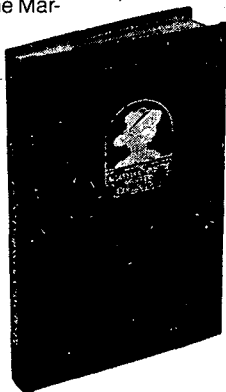
A blonde came in about five o'clock, sadness hanging on her pretty face, slick built with all

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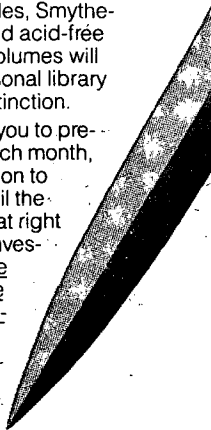
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her corners rounded off. She had a boy with her, about nine years old, and she sat him in a chair and told him to stay there. "My little brother," she said.

I nodded.

"He needs a heart transplant," she told me, "and I have to raise a thousand dollars to get him to Chicago before Friday or the heart they're holding for him will stop beating and little Parnell will die."

I knew the kid; his name was Maxie and he was one of a gang that used to come in all the time for day-old doughnuts.

"How much did she pay you for this act?" I asked him.

"Two bucks."

"Here's two more. Get out of here. No doughnuts till tomorrow."

The blonde shook a shoulder. "Well, I tried."

"Try some more," I said. I noticed people had been coming in, more than usual. "I've got a problem. You ever wait on tables?"

"For pay?"

"Of course."

"Why not?"

"I like your capitalistic spirit. That woman over there, she's Mamie. She's in charge. She'll show you where the aprons are and tell you which tables. Good luck. These don't look like our regular customers, so maybe there'll be some big tips and you

can make that thousand bucks before the night's over."

Her name was Brenda and as I watched her walk toward the kitchen, I took careful note of the tick-tock of her moving parts. This gal was going to make big tippers out of a lot of people who to this date in their lives had never tipped a dime.

The next day, after the lunchtime rush, it got quiet as it always does about two thirty, and then this guy Lionel Marley, the lawyer, came in and asked for Billy. I went and got him and got the courtesy of a get-lost for my trouble and then Marley and Billy went back and sat privately at their favorite table near the window. I couldn't hear them through the kitchen door, but looking through the glass I could see they weren't getting along nearly as well as they had the first time they'd met. Marley seemed to be complaining to Billy and Billy was complaining to Marley.

At last Marley left and I came out and asked Billy the hundred thousand dollar question: "Did he give you the money, Billy?"

"He will, he will."

"I'm sure. But when?"

"Will you tell me what the hell business this is of yours?"

"You still owe me three months' pay."

"I don't owe you anything; you're getting a partnership."

"I haven't got it yet. In the meantime, you're still in control, you're doing your best to ruin the business, and when it's all over I'll never get a dime."

Billy looked to see if Sam could hear from the kitchen, pulled me over to the window table to make sure we had privacy, and sat me down. "We've got a snag," he said.

"No money?"

"Oh, the money's there, all right. Marley's law firm down in Miami, they've got it locked in escrow. The trouble is, I've got these cousins, two of them, and they want some money, too. If Marley tries to pay me, they'll sue for two-thirds and probably get it."

I could see the spot Billy was in. "So what can you do?"

"Buy them off. That's what Marley advises. He's pretty smart. Like me, my cousins never really knew Uncle Seth. They don't know how much money he left. They pretty much don't know anything. For ten thousand bucks, Marley says, he can get them to sign off all rights to any inheritance. So, pretty cheap, I get rid of them and get all the rest myself."

It was a nice clean-cut swindle. I couldn't see what Billy was worried about. I asked him.

"I have to pay them up front,

ten thousand bucks; where the hell do I get ten thousand bucks?"

"Get it from Marley," I said.

"He can't do that. Once he opens the escrow, the law says he has to split it three ways. He needs to get them to sign the relinquishment *first*."

"Well, don't look at me," I said. "The way you fixed things, it doesn't even look like I'll get my three months' pay."

So that's the way it was for about a week: nothing changed. On the other hand, the flow of curiosity seekers never let up, and I enjoyed watching the jiggling gitalong of my new waitress, Brenda. She hustled from table to table and in and out of the kitchen, and me at the cashier's desk, when I wasn't too busy stashing away the customers' greenbacks, loving every minute of it.

What I couldn't understand was these customers. What is it, I wondered, that attracts people to a restaurant that promises to poison them when formerly that same restaurant, swearing the food was great, couldn't bring anybody in the door. Well, mine not to reason why, take it while it lasts, I told myself. How crazy can people be, the novelty has to run out before too long and then it'll slump back to what it was before.

I arranged for Brenda to work the last shift so she got off at eleven o'clock at night. Then I told her I felt responsible for her getting home safely that late after dark. I wouldn't listen to her protests—which really weren't too vigorous, I must say in all modesty—and it became general practice for me to walk her home every night. One thing led to another, and out of appreciation, she said, she began to invite me in for a cup of coffee or maybe a sip of wine and, well, you know. It was good. I was beginning to wish things would never change. So, of course, that's when they did.

Even though he didn't yet have any money from Marley, Billy already considered himself a rich man. Accordingly, he'd rented a nice little cottage secluded on a couple of acres on the edge of town. He lived there in sham splendor for about two weeks and then it happened: My phone blasted at three o'clock in the morning and here came Billy hollering so loud he didn't really need the telephone; I only lived five miles away.

"They're trying to kill me!" he yelled, nearly blowing out my eardrum. "Help!"

"Who's trying to kill you?" I asked.

"Don't ask dumb questions. Just get the hell over here!"

Sure I worked for him but was he still my boss in the middle of the night? I pulled my pants on over my pajamas. Who the hell did he think he was? I dragged on a sweater. The dirty rat still owed me three months' pay. The car started and I got to his house in five minutes flat. So what's all the commotion?

Billy's kitchen window was smashed, somebody had thrown something through it, and Billy, when I found him, was curled up in the low end of his bathtub.

"Marley warned me they'd do this!" Billy yelled. "He told me they wouldn't wait!"

"Who wouldn't wait? What happened?"

"My cousins, who else? I wouldn't listen." We went out to the living room, and Billy dropped into the comforting embrace of an earth-mother armchair. "That's not true," he said. "I did listen. But what could I do? Everything that's coming into the restaurant now is going to pay old debts. So where am I going to get ten thousand dollars?"

"Did you tell that to Marley?"

"Sure I told it to Marley. So what does Marley care? All he could say was 'Get it!'"

The poor slob, I thought; if I had ten thousand, I'd give it to him, anything to get out of there and get back to bed. So that would add up to two poor

slobs. But don't worry, I didn't have it; how lucky could I get?

I went looking for whatever had been thrown through the window and found it in the kitchen sink: a rock with a note stuck round it with masking tape. There was a message. I read it, then handed it to Billy.

I told him it looked like the fun was over for tonight, anyway. I went out and got in my car and went home and went to bed.

The note had said: "No more rocks, cousin. Get up the money in three days or the next one will be a bomb."

The next day, Billy and his big mouth, the story was all over the restaurant. Brenda asked me about it and I told her what I knew and she gave me a look like I wasn't so smart either. She got this expression on her face I'd never seen there before: disgust, exasperation, determination.

Just before closing, here came himself, Mr. Lionel Marley, Esq., Attorney-at-Law. He found himself a table and sat down. And there went my Miss Brenda, jiggling over even though his table was out of her sector, friendly and pretty, her even white teeth showing through her dimple-to-dimple smile.

"What do you recommend to-

day?" he said, answering her smile and not bothering to open the menu she handed him.

"We've had compliments on our curds and whey," she said and without even hearing her, he nodded okay, his eyes never leaving her gorgeous face.

The upshot was, eleven o'clock rolled around and right under my nose he walked her out to take her home, and even though he was the one who was going to bring my partner-to-be a fortune of money and maybe even get my three months' pay back if that's the way things turned out, I stood there watching the creep, hating him more and more.

That note from the cousins promised action in three days, so right away I moved into Billy's house. Every night at eleven o'clock that skunk Marley would walk Brenda home, and as for me, I'd drive out with Billy to his house and Billy would climb into a sleeping bag he'd stashed in the sanctuary of his bedroom closet and I'd sack out in the living room, squirming around all night trying to get comfortable on a six inches too short sofa. Nothing happened for three nights and nothing on the fourth night so by the fifth I knew it was getting close and I began to be as nervous as Billy.

About two thirty, I thought I heard some funny noises outside, so I got off the sofa and hid in the hallway. It was none too soon because the next thing that happened, the big living room picture window crashed inward and something thudded, onto a table and rolled, bumped on the floor, and then went BAM!

The room filled with smoke and the stink of gunpowder, and I tripped over an ottoman and fell on my face, then got up, and ran to the broken window and saw the shape of a man in the misty moonlight running across the lawn toward the road. A car was waiting and he yanked open the passenger-side door and the driver zipped the car off and there wasn't a chance in hell of me catching them.

But then a funny thing happened: instead of dusting off down the street to the main highway, the car did a crazy, sudden U-turn and came racing back toward the house. It got to Billy's lawn and I could see the passenger wrestling with the driver and the car was zigzagging all over the place tearing up the lawn—if anybody gave a damn—but for all the zigzags it was coming closer and closer to Billy's front porch.

I was there when it arrived and the driver slammed on the brakes and I had the passenger

door open and when Billy switched on the outside lights—well, you know who I had by the collar: our slick friend Lionel Marley.

We moved the party into the still-smoky living room, and the driver of the car settled her comfy flank up cosy against mine on the sofa and she explained: "When I first read in the papers about the inheritance, well, it sounded like easy money. So like all the rest of those would-be moochers, I was attracted." Brenda stirred her haunches and it felt nice against my side. "I didn't think it would work," she went on, "but I saw that kid so I tried that trick and you caught on; well, what the hell. Then you offered me a job as a waitress, you trusted me, and that was nice, so I took it. Why not? I needed the money."

Nobody said anything so Brenda decided to keep talking: "When I'd been there a while and saw what was going on with this make-believe lawyer here, I figured out what he was trying to pull on my friends—I guess it takes one to know one—so when you guys needed help, I made my play. He's almost as simple as you two." She must have seen the hurt look on my face, wiped it off with a brush of her soothing lips against my cheek.

Billy was beginning to un-

derstand a little of what was going on, groped for the rest. "But what about my inheritance?"

"There is no inheritance."

"Does that mean Uncle Seth never died?"

"That's right. Also, he never lived."

"And my cousins?"

"They never lived, either."

"Then why did Marley need ten thousand dollars?"

"Why does anybody need ten thousand dollars?"

I began to feel sorry for poor Billy. Here in one swoop his whole family'd been wiped out and he was left an orphan. Not only that, the biggest benefactor of his whole life had turned out to be a crook.

"Billy," I said, "it's not all bad."

"What's good?"

"You know that vacancy we have in the kitchen, how bad we need a dishwasher, can't find one?"

Billy nodded dully.

"I think we've got him. I have a hunch Lionel here is getting ready to apply for the job."

Billy grunted.

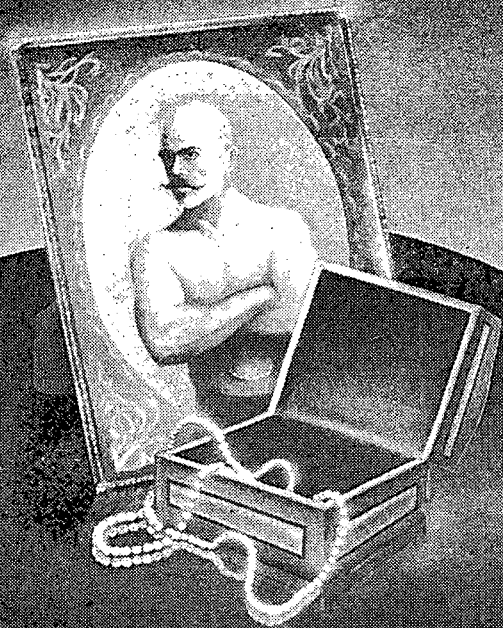
Lionel Marley squirmed.

But that wasn't the only good news I had for Billy. Our crowds of customers were getting bigger every day. The restaurant wasn't just a novelty any more, it was an "in" place, the smart spot in town to eat. So I said: "Billy, you're going to come into a fortune after all."

And when I judged the grin of comprehension had spread far enough across his face, I added: "Partner."

FICTION

Bitter Cold for May



by Sean McMartin

As a rule I don't read obituary columns but for some unknown reason I skimmed this one. There it was:
"Hufnagel, Rudi, of 4282 Park Avenue, Bronx, on November 20, 1985, age 90. Beloved husband of Jennie. Services at Boylston Funeral Home."

Rudi to Jennie, maybe, but to my family, conscious of that huge, entirely bald head on a body barely five feet four, he was always "Headsy," ex-wrestler and well-meaning *dummkopf*. Ninety. That would have made him forty at the time of the Great Robbery.-

I remember the robbery from the first delicious shock to the last recrimination. I was eleven at the time. We had moved from the Southern Boulevard to Park Avenue six months before. Park Avenue, lest anyone be misled, departs from the soignée around Ninety-Sixth street, and by the time it reaches into the Bronx it is nothing more than a distant cousin.

We lived on the top floor in the seventh of ten dust-colored tenements, stretching across two blocks, known as the Ten Commandments. As my father used to say, right next to Adultery. There were four families on each floor, their apartment doors forming pentagons, the staircase being the base. The Macks, a very old couple, were right by the stairs, the Hufnagels catercornered next to them. The Griffiths had the next catercorner with us alongside.

Among the Griffiths, Hufnagels, and us—the McCabes—there was a friendship born of something in common. We were all living on Park Avenue enroute to or from better things. The Hufnagels had once owned a home in Brooklyn Heights, but problems with Headsy's eyes had cost him his job as a watchmaker. He did a little carpentry now to make ends meet.

The Griffiths were in their early twenties. Whitey Griffith coupled a lingering, never-explained illness with an equally unexplained inability to hold a job. They regarded Park Avenue as a plateau of sorts until Whitey could get a break. The McCabes were moving west in increments to the Grand Concourse with its tree-lined splendor; neither defeated like the Hufnagels nor ill-starred like the Griffiths.

Sundays, in those days long before television, was visiting day. It was the custom, among neighbors, to exchange afternoon visits. This particular Sunday the Hufnagels were hosts.

Mom clumped around in her stockinged feet, checking all our windows before leaving. The fire escape window in the bedroom had a faulty catch that the janitor had been promising to replace

for two weeks now. Mom eyed it sourly. I sulked because I would be the only kid at the Hufnagels'. Most of my gang were out visiting with their parents for the afternoon, and so I had no grounds for vigorous protest.

Headsy opened the door to our ring. The hall light reflected like Fourth of July sparklers off his shiny dome. His stamp-sized mustache (so much like Adolf Hitler's) sat on a long, doleful lip. Gold-rimmed glasses, thick and whorled like onion slices, magnified his eyes like nickels in subway turnstiles. He wore a blue silk polo shirt through which his underwear showed like a scrap of paper floating in watery ink.

"Welcome to the Hufnagel house," he chirped, his accent lending a certain *gemütlichkeit* to the occasion. "Jennie, it's the McCabes come."

"Oh," Mrs. Hufnagel yelled back, her continuing words lost in a farrago of giggles and snorts.

The Hufnagel apartment was a study in turgidity, enshrouded as it was with heavy brown drapes on all its windows. The squat, dark furniture was dotted with yellowing antimacassars, the tables and piano covered with pompom-fringed green scarves on each of which rested pink-veined conch shells.

Mrs. Hufnagel came out of the kitchen, an unremarkable woman with dry gold hair, a plump, shapeless figure, and an appreciation for the joy of small comforts that bordered on euphoria.

"Rudi," she said, hugging herself between crossed arms. "Make the McCabes sit down, why don't you?" She looked at my mother in mock exasperation, nodding toward her husband and raising her eyebrows.

Headsy looked baffled, jumped back and forth among us like a ringmaster, pointed out chairs in every direction, then gave up all at once, letting people fall where they might.

"You take elderberry wine, Chim?" he stagewhispered to my father, who solemnly winked.

"Jennie makes coffee," he explained to my mother, who was busy conveying to my father with a regal expression that his intake of wine would be carefully watched.

The doorbell barely rang.

"That must be the Griffiths," Mrs. Hufnagel said, looking at her husband, who, once again faced with a choice of actions, floundered.

"Answer it once," his wife said, looking at my mother for commiseration.

He bounced out and, after a murmur of conversation, announced in a loud voice that it was the Griffiths, preceded them in, looking frantically for chairs and settling for an apologetic smile at Mrs. Griffith. My mother motioned me off the sofa and onto a bridge chair while the newcomers took their places on the edge of the sofa.

The Griffiths were a thin, pale couple, their grains perfectly matched. Mae Griffith was knife featured, birdlike, with tan hair and flat lips through which her words came in a lisping whine. Whitey was a towhead from his eyebrows and lashes to his beard stubble. All his features were pushed tight against an imaginary longitude drawn down the center of his face. His eyes were nearly colorless, and they slid quickly away whenever you looked at him. My mother couldn't stand him, partly because he was shifty looking and partly because lately he had been spending a lot of time on the roof. She swore black and white that twice now she had caught him looking into our apartment.

Headsy offered some wine to Whitey who shook his head, held up one hand and with the other pointed to his stomach.

The refreshments were served, wine and coffee for the adults, a warm, syrupy chocolate drink for me. The six of them ground themselves into their seats as though it was easier to thrust and parry from a position of solidarity. I got up to look at the pictures on the wall, monochromes of woodland scenes or mountain trails, varnished to a glassiness, the ground and sky blending in a brownish yellow blur.

I worked my way to the photograph on top of the piano. I could feel Headsy's eyes on my back. He must have been in his twenties when it was taken, already bald as a soccer ball, barechested, arms folded so that the hidden fists pushed the biceps into bold relief. A belt half a foot wide with a medallion in the center attested to an award of some sort. The face in the picture was truculent, mouthless under a bushy mustache (a la Kaiser Wilhelm?), eyes glaring at an imagined opponent.

"Then I was amateur welterweight champeen in Hamburg," Headsy said over my shoulder. "*That* was wrestling. No flying tackles, no flying mares." He made a sick face. "Just skill and muscle and you had to move like . . ." He lurched his shoulders, wrenching his wrists across each other, bending his knee and twisting an imaginary opponent's arm in what I knew was a hammer-lock . . . "so."

I smiled politely.

"When my ship comes in, I open my wrestling school. You will be my first pupil, *ja*? Half price."

"Sure," I said.

Headsy dreamed about opening a wrestling school the way other people dream about retiring to Florida.

They reshuffled themselves by sexes, the men nearest me, the women leaning toward each other in postures and sub rosa exchanges. The air became drowsy with the babble and hum of conversations. There was a brief flurry between my mother and Mrs. Hufnagel and Mom jumped up.

"I'm going to run inside and get some ice cubes," she said. "There's something the matter with their Frigidaire."

Mrs. Hufnagel shook her head. "Till my Rudi fixes it, Elizabeth gives me some of hers."

Whitey's eyes darted toward my mother, back to his wife, then all around the room.

"Hon," he said, turning to his wife again, "doncha think we better be goin'? I mean, it's late 'n' all."

She looked disappointed. "In a few minutes, huh, hon? Elizabeth was gonna tell us about a new recipe."

Whitey's hand moved absently to his stomach. I thought Mom was gone an unusually long time just to pick up some ice cubes. When she finally came back, there was a funny little smile on her face.

"Guess what," she said, cocking her head to one side. "The rich McCabes have been *robbed*."

"Oh, my Gawd," Mrs. Hufnagel said, putting a hand on top of her head.

"Whatta ya mean robbed?" Pop asked.

"Robbed," Mom said. "R-O-B-B-E-D. Every blessed piece of jewelry I own."

She kept it in a janned box stuffed with cotton batting, a silver and aquamarine ring too big for her fingers; her grandmother's gold watch, which never had worked; my gold baby ring, worn thin as paper; a pair of gold earrings; a crescent-shaped garnet brooch with several of the stones missing; and a gold bracelet. Because of Mom's fear of burglars, the box was moved from closet to closet, drawer to drawer, sugar canister to flour container, under the bathtub and behind the ice cube trays in the refrigerator, in a sequence devised by Mom to thwart the most imaginative crook. Obviously, the ice cube compartment had been the last resting place.

"Lord bless's and save's," Mae Griffith said.

"You call the police at once," Mrs. Hufnagel said. "Go ahead, Elizabeth. Use my telephone."

"Ahaah," Mom said. "A lot of good that'll do." She shook her head in disbelief. "You read about things like this in the *Daily News*."

"I agree with Elizabeth," Whitey said suddenly. "If you don't cross the cops' palms with a fi' dollar bill, you can kiss your stuff goodbye, take it from me."

My mother glanced sharply at him, probably because he'd used her first name. His eyes grappled with hers for a second, then fell away.

"Jim, we better go back and see if anything else is missing," she said.

Pop's one good suit and her new portable sewing machine, on which she was still making payments, the only other things of any value, hadn't been touched. Mom stood in front of the refrigerator, hand to her cheek, running her pinky slowly back and forth over her lower lip.

"Jim," she said. "It was someone who knew us."

"How can you tell that, Charlie Chan?"

"First of all," she said, "a regular sneak thief would've taken your suit and my sewing machine. Second of all, that jewelry was here last night when I moved it from the dish closet, just before we left for my sister Anna's house. We been here all day, except for church, so it must've been last night it was taken." She sniffed. "Don't tell me it wasn't somebody knew we were out." She took a breath. "Like Whitey Griffith."

My father looked shocked.

"Can't look you in the eye," Mom went on. "Always up on the roof looking down into the apartments. Don't tell me."

My father looked out the window as though he might catch Whitey looking in.

"He's been sick," he said without much conviction.

"What's that got to do with anything?" she snapped. "Did you hear what he said about the police? *Sure* he don't want them called. They'll watch all the hock shops."

"Well, he's been up against it, no use denying it," Pop said, undecided. "The little Mae brings in ain't much."

"She's the one I feel sorry for," Mom said.

"Maybe we better call the cops," Pop said. "They can search his flat before he can get rid of it."

Mom hesitated. "No, not yet. I want to think." She looked at me and shook her finger. "I don't want you saying a word about what your father and me have been talking about, you hear me, Jackie?"

She didn't have to call the police, the Hufnagels already had. Just as we were sitting down to eat, a detective from the Ryer Avenue station came up. Mrs. Hufnagel nodded with satisfaction in the hallway. Detective Willard was a big man with a heavy jaw and a bored look. He wrote down everything without saying a word. He examined the door, the faulty catch on the window, looked closely to see if there were any marks on the wood, then inspected the dumbwaiter door.

Mom explained about keeping all her valuables well hidden. Willard just grunted.

On the way out Pop asked, "Any chance of getting the stuff back, cap?"

The detective shrugged. "Sometimes you do, sometimes you don't."

Headsy popped in a little later for the ice cubes Mom had forgotten in all the excitement. She was a little distant, not quite having forgiven the Hufnagels for going over her head and calling the police.

"I remember something," Headsy said, rubbing his chin with a thumb and index finger. "Over on the next block about a year ago was a robbery just like this one. Top floor. Same kind of jewelry taken, same—what they call—Em Oh, *ja*? They come in through the dumbwaiter shaft."

"Hey," I yipped. "The Griffith dumbwaiter is right opposite ours. Whitey could've come in that way."

Mom's eyes bored into me. Pop bared his teeth. Headsy looked as though he were having difficulty translating what I had said.

"*Whitey*? You think *Whitey*?"

"We don't think anybody," Mom said, motioning me inside with her head. "Jackie listens to too many crime shows. Please forget what you heard, Head . . . Mr. Hufnagel."

"*Ja, ja*," he said, trying to smile. "Sure."

I was sent to bed an hour early after a bawling out that made my ears ring. I heard Mom talking to Mae Griffith through the dumbwaiter, something about recipes for Irish soda bread, then mumbled words from Mae and an occasional "uh huh" from Mom. The door finally slammed.

"Well, that settles it," Mom said to Pop. "She went over to her sister Julie's house around eight. *Alone*. She didn't get back until

nearly ten. Same time we were out. Jim, it's hidden in that flat right now."

"Call the cops," Pop said.

"There must be some way of getting that stuff back without hurting Mae," Mom said.

I went upstairs the next morning to watch the guy on the roof across the street fly his pigeons, great swarms of them, like splashes of grey and white paint across the sky. Whitey was sitting there in the shade of the dumbwaiter shaft, his shirt off, his fish-belly skin soaking up the warmth but not the rays of the morning sun.

"What's the good word, Jackie?"

I shrugged.

"Hear you had the cops last night," he said casually.

"Yeah."

"Deuced lotta good they'll do. They come up with anything?"

"Nah," I said, watching the pigeons swerve on a dime, making a swoosh over my head.

"Before we move," Whitey said, letting his eyes rest on mine for a second, "I could maybe talk to a few guys I know. You know, pass the word to keep an eye out for your mother's stuff."

I squinted at him. "You moving?"

"Maybe," he said. "Jersey. My brother owns a chicken farm in Sparta. Good air. I been thinking about it."

"Oh."

Moving. That sure knocked a hole in things. I told Mom. She told Pop when he got home from work, before he even got his cap off.

"There goes my jewelry," she said. "He don't have to hock it here. He can do it in Jersey. If that don't beat the Dutch."

"You better talk to that detective."

I could see the conflict in her eyes. Mae Griffith's feelings or her jewelry. She glared at both of us.

"If either one of you turns out to be a crook, don't ever let your poor wife find out."

She sat there after supper for maybe an hour without saying a word, her eyes fixed on the iron devil's-head matchbox over the stove. Finally she nodded, took a deep breath, and looked at me.

"I got an idea," she said. "Whatever you hear me say, keep your big mouth shut, you hear?"

She walked to the open door and looked at the Griffith and Hufnagel doors, both of which were open to catch whatever breeze might be stirring in the massive heat.

"Yoohoo. Anybody home?"

Mrs. Hufnagel came to the door, wiping her hands on a dish towel.

"I thought you might be interested," Mom said. "We got a call from that detective. You know, the one about the robbery. He found something. Too early to tell what, but something."

"You don't say," Mrs. Hufnagel said.

Mae Griffith came to the door and Mom repeated it to her.

"He's doing some checking around. We should hear something in a day or so."

"Oh, that's grand, Elizabeth," Mae said. "Wait'll I tell Whitey."

Mom came back in with a squeamish look on her face.

"God, how I hate to lie."

Headsy rapped on the door a few minutes later.

"Jennie tells me the good news about the jewelry," he said. His face was sad. "Mrs. McCabe, crime must be punished—I know this—but what comes of Mae? Do you consider that?"

My mother's eyes widened, taking in all five foot four of him. If there's anything she hates, it's someone figuring he's more charitable than she is.

"Certainly," she said with dignity. "I am not made of stone."

Headsy shrank a little before that iron look.

"I only thought . . ." He made a vague motion with his hands. "I think of that girl like a daughter."

Oh, *sure*. Mom once said with a knowing smile that whatever was going on between them was typical May-December. She was only afraid that some day Jennie Hufnagel would catch wise.

She gave Headsy a comrade-in-arms look. "We're bringing Mae with us to the Fox Crotona tonight. The flat'll be empty. If Whitey brings the jewels back, I'll tell the police it was all a mistake. If he tries to bluff it out . . ." She shrugged.

Headsy looked at her with admiration.

"You have a good heart, Mrs. McCabe."

She said when he was gone, "I hope it ain't a mistake, telling him. He's such a dumbcuff he could ruin everything."

She went next door and spent some time with the Griffiths. When she returned, she was all smiles.

"She finally agreed to go," Mom said. "She didn't want to, but Whitey talked her into it."

Mae Griffith had on her Sunday dress and she looked kind of pretty. Whitey slouched out behind her, and Mom's face hardened.

"We'll have Mae back by eleven," she said.

"Have a good time and don't do nothin' I wouldn't do," Whitey said.

"Hmmm," Mom said, turning away.

The picture was *The Informer* with Victor McLaghlen, Heather Angel, and Una O'Connor. All through the show I kept looking at the lighted clock on top of the exit sign. Finally the darned thing ended. Good ol' Pop suggested sodas. Mom gave him a dirty look and said no, it was late and Jackie needed his sleep. When we got home, Mae thanked them for a real nice nice time and were they sure she couldn't pay her way. Mom said no, it was our treat and the chitchat went on until I was ready to bust. The last goodnight was finally said and in we went.

Mom turned on the light and there it was, right in the middle of the kitchen table, shining like a rare violin under the forty watt bulb. Mom opened the box and checked each piece.

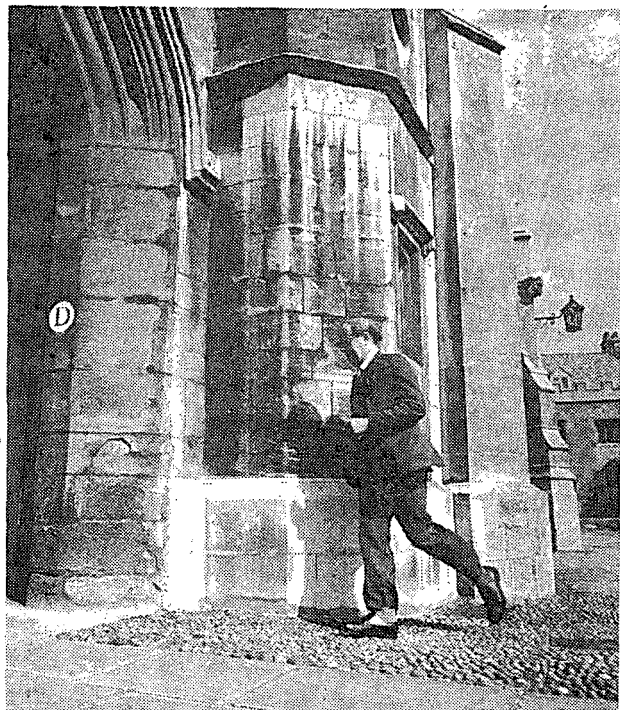
"All here," she said, licking her thumb and pinning a medal on her dress. "If I do say so myself."

Her face suddenly looked puzzled. She held up the watch. In the silence the ticking sounded like the banging of radiator pipes. The gold was polished, the face was sparkling clean and there was a winding stem where one had not been.

Mom said in a voice like Una O'Connor's in *The Informer*; "My God in heaven, it was Headsy all along. Oh, God, God forgive me."

When the Griffiths left, Mom threw them a party. She treated Whitey like the returned prodigal. Sunday afternoons with the Hufnagels sputtered out. When we moved to the Grand Concourse, we lost touch completely. I have often wondered whether Headsy ever did get up the money for his wrestling school. Poor *dummkopf*.

THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



Arthur Tress

Are they ahead of him or behind? Or lost at B3? We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less—and be sure to include a crime, please), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the May Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

FICTION

The Puddle Diver

by Doug Allyn



Illustration by Nick Jainschigg

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It's possible Charlie Bauer's siren saved me from serious bodily injury. One of my regular customers had started a shoving match with a line-backer-sized tourist at the pool table. I'd charged out from behind the bar to try to break it up when the whoop of the approaching siren and the shriek of rubber in the parking lot mellowed everybody out. We couldn't be sure what the siren meant, of course, since the only windows in the Crow's Nest face Lake Huron and the harbor; still, ask not for whom the horn toots.

Charlie Bauer stalked through the back door a moment later, looking extremely unhappy, which made me unhappy, too. At six six and two seventy, Charlie's moods would be contagious even if he weren't the county sheriff. He may not be solid muscle any more, he's pushing fifty, going a little gray on top and bulgy in the middle, but he's still big enough to make people uneasy, and a giant surly cop is not what I needed to perk up my afternoon trade.

He motioned me back to my office, followed me in, and closed the door behind us.

"Mitch, I've got a problem, and I need help. Looks like we've got a body down."

"Who?" I asked.

"Addison, I think his name is.

Harvey Addison? Andrea Dev-
eraux's fiancé."

"Sweet Jesus," I said softly. I didn't say anything for a moment. I couldn't. "What happened?" I managed at last.

"Nobody's sure. Addison and Terry Fortier were diving on the *Queen of Lorraine*. Terry came up, Addison didn't. Baggers Gant was down with them videotaping the dive, but he didn't go inside the wreck. I want you to go down after the body."

"I thought the department had a contract with Bill Atkins for this sort of thing."

"He's down on Saginaw Bay diving on a light plane and we're supposed to get a three-day blow tonight. I need somebody to go out there right now."

I glanced out my office window. Across the harbor the sky was darkening and Lake Huron already looked rough, with three- to four-foot seas. Typical weather for August. Tour Michigan, the water wonderland, the brochures say. What they don't say is that only half of the water is in the lakes. The other half will fall on your head at frequent intervals.

"Sorry," I said, "you'll have to get somebody else, Charlie."

"What the hell? You helped us out once before."

"Right," I said. "Once. A lot of guys will dive on a

body—once. It's not something you ever want to do again. Besides, I've got a business to run here."

"The *Queen's* at two hundred feet. Do you know anybody else who can work that deep?"

"Yeah," I said, "Terry can, or even Baggers. And they're already out there."

"I don't want either of them going back down. In fact, I've ordered them to stay out of the water."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"Maybe nothing," he said stubbornly, "but Terry and Addison went down together and Addison didn't come back. Terry and Andrea were pretty tight at one time, as I recall. Real tight."

"Nuts, Charlie, if you suspect every guy who's had the hots for Andrea Deveraux sometime or other, you'll have to arrest half the clowns that grew up in this town, including me. Terry's always been a little wild, maybe, but not that way, and you know it."

"I know he's a friend of yours, Mitch, so I'll put it to you straight. We're not talking about just anybody here, we're talking about Andrea Deveraux's fiancé. I can't take any chances with this. If you won't go down, I'm going to hold Terry on suspicion until Atkins gets back.

I've got to cover myself. You know what old man Deveraux's like."

Charlie had a point. In that long ago summer when I'd been Andrea's latest, and temporarily welcome at the Deveraux estate, I'd gotten to know Jason Deveraux in passing. He was my fantasy father-figure, tall, distinguished, head of DevCon Paper Mills, the Deveraux Mills Fleet, the Deveraux Institute. A charming, glib, vindictive son of a bitch. I liked him a lot. And Bauer was right. He was not someone to cross.

"Come on, Mitch," Bauer pleaded quietly, "I haven't been keeping score, but you must owe me at least one. And if not me, then Terry. I don't want to lock him up, but I will. How about it?"

"I guess I can get Sharon to come in early to tend bar and keep an eye on things," I sighed. "You've scared off half of my customers anyway. I'll get my gear and meet you at my boat in twenty minutes."

"Good," Bauer said. "I won't forget this, Mitch. This ah, Addison," he added, pausing in the doorway, "did you know him?"

"I met him once," I said.

"And?"

"He seemed nice enough," I shrugged. "Andrea's always had good taste. I'll see you at the harbor. Twenty minutes."

I'd met Harvey Addison a month earlier, Fourth of July weekend. The Crow's Nest was packed with wall to wall tourists, but I noticed him right away because he came in with Andrea. Even after all these years I still get a visceral twinge whenever she walks into a room. First loves are like that for everyone, I suppose, but I think she has a similar effect on most people. She's a striking woman, broad shouldered with dark, tousled hair. Her features are too angular to be considered conventionally pretty, but there's a feline magnetism about her, a restlessness, that more than compensates. For me, at least.

Naturally, I checked out the latest of my successors. He was depressingly handsome, tall, trim, and tan, with sandy hair, wearing a linen blazer that cost as much as air fare to Australia. He looked early thirtiyish, maybe a year or two younger than Andrea, although she never seems to change. They conferred for a moment by the door, then she wandered off to talk to friends and he came straight back to my office, rapping lightly on the door before he stepped in.

"Mr. Mitchell?" he said, offering his hand. "I'm Harvey Addison. I understand that among other things, you're the

dean of the local scuba divers."

"I don't think I'm old enough to be a dean yet," I said, "but I know most of the people in the area who dive, and I've been known to get wet myself. What can I do for you?" His handshake was firm, but not a contest. Score one for him. He eased into one of the captain's chairs in front of my desk.

"I'm interested in chartering a boat for a month or so. I'm told there are some interesting wrecks in the area."

"A few," I nodded. "There are nearly a hundred wrecks within fifteen miles of where you're sitting, and over six thousand major wrecks in the Great Lakes that we have record of. God only knows how many smaller ships there are. The big lakes are hard on boats. And people, too, sometimes."

"Actually, there's a specific wreck I'm interested in, the *Queen of Lorraine*."

"The *Queen*?" I said, raising an eyebrow.

"That's right. Do you know anything about her?"

"Some. She was built in 1926, flagship of the Deveraux Mills Fleet," I recited. "She was bound for Chicago out of Erie with a cargo of rolled steel in November, 1968, when she was rammed by a Swedish freighter, the ah... the *Halmstad*. Her captain apparently didn't real-

ize how badly she was damaged and tried to run her for the beach on North Point. He didn't make it. She rolled and sank. Most of her crew got off, but at least a half dozen didn't, including the captain."

"I'm impressed," Addison said. "You've dived on her, then?"

"He hasn't," Terry Fortier said from the doorway, "but I have." He'd wandered in during the last few moments of our conversation. I'd been expecting him: He'd been shooting pool in the lounge and I knew he wouldn't miss a chance to check out Andrea's latest. They were quite a contrast, Addison, the fairhaired WASP, and Terry, compactly built, hawk-faced, dark as a pirate.

I introduced them and Terry parked a hip on the corner of my desk, resting the hilt of his pool cue on the floor.

"The *Queen's* at two hundred feet," he continued, "upside down, with her masts and stacks buried in the mud, right in the middle of the Huron Bottomlands Preserve."

"Preserve?" Addison frowned.

"The legislature passed a law back in 'eighty outlawing any plundering of the wrecks," I explained. "You need a permit to dive on any ship in the Preserve. The law's difficult to enforce, though, and there's still a black market for ships' jew-

elry,' running lights, wheels, portholes, things like that. In fact, I heard a rumor that some of the jewelry from the *Queen* was on the market recently."

"Yeah," Terry said blandly, "I heard that, too. Why the particular interest in the *Queen*, Harvey? There are plenty of wrecks out there."

"She belonged to my fiancée's family, the Deverauxes. Perhaps you've met Andrea?"

His innocence was unfeigned, so apparently she hadn't told him about Terry. Or me. Or any of the others either, probably. I wondered how well he really knew her.

"Sure," Terry said, "we went to high school together. You remember Andy, don't you, Mitch?"

"Vaguely," I said. "Nice kid."

"I think so," Addison said smugly. "In any case, it seems there was a large bronze plaque bolted to the wall of the passengers' salon when the ship was launched, and my future father-in-law is pretty keen on recovering it for the Deveraux Institute museum. I have a picture here," he said, retrieving an old photo of the *Queen of Lorraine* from an inside pocket of his sportcoat. "The lounge is all the way forward here, in the bow. From the blueprints, it looks like the only way to get into it is down a long corridor from the

main entrance amidships." He passed the photograph to Terry. "What do you think? Could we get in there?"

"I don't know," Terry said, frowning at the photo. "I haven't been inside at that end of the ship, but her bow area's clear of the bottom. Maybe."

"You said 'we,' Mr. Addison," I said. "Are you planning to dive on the *Queen* yourself?"

"Of course," he said, "that's the whole point. I want the plaque as a sort of wedding present for Mr. Deveraux. I've never been down two hundred feet, but I'm a quick learner and I've done some diving."

"In the Great Lakes?" I asked.

"No, mostly in the Caribbean and off the Florida coast, but I don't imagine there's much difference."

"Actually there's quite a bit," I said. "The lakes are dark and dirty and cold as a witch's kiss. The visibility's lousy because of the silt, and the currents can be tricky as hell. The wrecks are usually in good shape, though. They don't deteriorate in fresh water, which makes them seem deceptively safe sometimes. They're not."

"And, of course, there may be a body or two," Terry said, "which is why Mitch here hasn't been down to the *Queen* himself. How do you feel about bodies, Harvey?"

"There was a skeleton on one of the wrecks off Florida," he said. "I managed."

"I'm not talking about skeletons," Terry smiled, "I'm talking about bodies."

"But the *Queen's* been down nearly twenty years, surely—"

"At two hundred feet the lake temperature only varies from thirty-four to thirty-eight degrees," Terry said, "so the bodies don't deteriorate, and lake fish don't scavenge that deep. The *Griffin* went down in 1689, but if she's deep enough, whoever went down with her is probably still aboard, and in one piece. More or less."

"You've got to be kidding," Addison said.

"I'm afraid he's not," I said. "There may be six men still aboard the *Queen*. It's something to consider."

Addison eyed us with obvious suspicion. "Look," he said stiffly, "I know it's probably a local custom to have a little fun with the new kid on the block, but I'm dead serious about diving on the *Queen*. I'm no puddle diver. I've worked at a hundred feet and I can handle two hundred with a little training. I want to hire a boat and an experienced diver. Now, is either of you interested, or not?"

"Don't let these louts get your goat, Harvey," Andrea said, leaning over the back of his

chair, her lips brushing the air beside his cheek, "they're experts. The class clowns of Huron Harbor High. And don't get up on my account, gentlemen, if the thought had even occurred to you." She eased gracefully into the captain's chair next to Harvey's, drew a cigarette from her handbag, and waited for him to light it for her. Which he did with not quite unseemly haste.

"Mitch, Terry," she nodded, blowing a plume of smoke in my direction, "how are you? It's been a long time."

"You wouldn't know it to look at you," I said honestly, "you look terrific." And she did. Almost. She was wearing an unbleached muslin sunsuit that showed her figure to good advantage, but the tequila sunrise in her hand looked suspiciously like a triple to my practiced eye, and she'd kept her sunglasses on, even though the Crow's Nest is dim as a dungeon. I'd heard her mother was summering in a posh sanitarium for substance abusers, and I wondered if Andrea was going to make it a family tradition.

"I'm surprised to find you back in town and running the Nest, Mitch," she said.

"Why surprised?" I said. "Some of my best friends are saloons."

"I don't know, I remember

you as being irritatingly ambitious. I thought you had your eye on bigger things."

"I still have, in a way," I said, indicating the window.

"You mean the harbor?" she frowned, following my glance.

"No," I said, "the lakes."

She puzzled over that for a moment, then dismissed the idea with a shrug. The talk turned to the difficulties in obtaining a salvor's permit from the DNR, but I didn't pay much attention. A moot point. Her father could probably finagle a permit to cede Alaska to the Bulgarians if the mood struck him. Instead, I played a little game.

I switched on an imaginary slide projector in my head, and tried to align my undimmed images of Andrea from the summer after graduation with the woman seated next to Harvey. They didn't match. The changes were slight, but significant. The cigarette, the tequila triple, the lines of petulance etched permanently around her mouth. But then my little projector went out of control and the memories came rushing over me in a flood, Andrea in my arms at the senior prom, Andrea on the foredeck of my first little sloop, wearing an electric blue bikini that caused me physical pain, Andrea by moonlight, the lake spray glistening

on her shoulders as we made love for hours on a tattered beach blanket with the surf a symphony of thunder in the background. And, of course, Andrea enraged, coldly furious at my demand that she miss the July Fourth beach party because I had to work. She'd gone to the party, and out of my life, and as it happened, into Terry's that same night. But only briefly. In September she'd gone off to Bryn Mawr and—

They were staring at me expectantly.

"I'm sorry," I said, "I was ... woolgathering. What—?"

"Harvey asked if he could charter you and the *Bonita* exclusive for a month or so," Terry said. "If you're too busy, I'd be happy to take him on. I can use the charter."

"Maybe that would be best," I nodded. "I'm, ah, pretty well booked up, and since you've already been down to the *Queen* ..." I was having trouble breathing. My chest was constricted by a long forgotten ache, one that had nothing to do with the woman in front of me, only with the one I'd lost.

"Good," Harvey said, rising. "It's settled, then. I look forward to it. It's been a pleasure meeting both of you." Andrea walked out without a word as we made our goodbyes.

Terry watched them make

their way through the afternoon crowd, Andy moving a bit unsteadily I thought, then he crossed to my liquor cabinet and poured two snifters of Courvoisier.

"Here," he said, passing one to me, "you look like you need one."

"Was I that obvious?"

"Probably only to me. She hasn't changed a bit, has she?"

"It's been a long time," I said. "Everybody changes."

"Not Andy," he said, sipping the brandy thoughtfully, "she's like one of the deep water ladies. I don't think she'll ever change."

It occurred to me that Terry probably had a few memories of his own, so I sipped the brandy, letting the warmth of it soothe my pain, and said nothing. And maybe that was a mistake.

Charlie Bauer was waiting on the dock, staring doubtfully at the *Bonita* when I pulled up.

"Christ," he said, "are we goin' out there in this thing? I've seen wrecks on the beach lookin' better'n it does."

"She was a wreck," I said, "a Chris Craft Sea Skiff, built in 'fifty-eight, sunk in a storm in 'seventy six. I salvaged her out of the deep channel in the Charlevoix inlet and fixed her up."

"It don't look like you fixed her up much," he said, frowning.

"No reason to," I said. "Divers' boats always look crappy anyway, what with tanks and weight belts and salvage bang-in' around. She's seaworthy enough."

"I'll bet the first guy who owned her thought so, too," Bauer grumbled. He chucked his hat into his prowler car and helped me transfer the three sets of double eighty air tanks from the back of my Jeep to the racks of the *Nita's* gunwales, handling the hundred and twenty-five pound packs with ease. You can never have too many spare tanks on a dive boat, but I probably wouldn't need them today. The sky was darkening rapidly and the wind was rising. I'd only have time for one dive before the storm hit.

I fired up the *Bonita* and her Chevy inboard grumbled to life, coughing and hawking like an old man in the morning. "Grab my duffel bag out of the Jeep and cast off while I warm her up," I shouted at Bauer over the mutter of the engine.

"You got a radio aboard?" he yelled back.

"Ship to shore, marine band. Your office can monitor us on channel sixteen."

"Good enough."

I checked the gauges and the radio while Charlie called his office from his prowler car. The *Nita's* fuel tanks were topped off, and everything else read normal, which was good. The *Queen of Lorraine* was three miles offshore and I didn't like the look of the bay at all. My duffel bag thumped on the deck behind me. Bauer cast off the mooring lines and scrambled aboard with all the grace of a waltzing bear.

I eased the *Bonita* forward out of her berth, keeping our speed to a crawl to avoid rocking the other vessels at their moorings. As soon as we cleared the harbor mouth, I opened the throttle and she sprinted out into the bay, bucking her way through choppy five foot seas, waves that could be thirty feet high in a few hours but not much farther apart than they were now, ship killers that hammered major vessels to pieces and swallowed them down, from the *Griffin* to the *Edmund Fitzgerald*.

"Take the wheel," I shouted at Bauer, "I've got to get my gear on."

"Maybe you better keep it," he said, shaking his head, "I don't know squat about boats."

"Just keep her pointed the way she is now. You'll see Terry's boat when we clear North Point. Head right for it."

He nodded reluctantly and took over. I moved cautiously to the stern, unzipped my duffel bag, and stripped down to my swim trunks. I hauled my "woolly bears" out of the bag and slipped them on. The fluffy long underwear suit probably looked ludicrous for an August afternoon, but where I was going it's always deep in dark December.

The full-body Viking dry suit was next, a bulky, bulgy, neoprene outfit that makes you look like a pregnant walrus. I felt Bauer cut the throttle as I finished giving my equipment a quick once-over. Terry's twenty-seven foot white Bayliner, the *William Kidd*, was fifty yards or so off our port bow, bobbing like a tethered kite in the choppy seas.

I took the wheel from Charlie and eased the *Bonita* alongside. The *Kidd* is her exact opposite, sparkling new, fiberglass, top of the line, with twin Volvo engines and a fair sized cabin. Baggers Gant, a towheaded kid from Ohio who works oil rigs with Terry in the winter and as his gofer and safety diver in the summer months, tossed Charlie a line. We moored the boats together, ten yards apart.

"What happened?" I shouted.

"I don't know," Terry called back. "We got into the main salon okay, found the damn plaque

and got about half the bolts out of it. I figured we'd need another dive to finish anyway, so I signaled Harvey time's up and made my way out. I thought he was right behind me. Baggers swam over to one of the salon portholes and signaled with a light, but we couldn't see anything inside and we didn't have enough air to go back in."

"Why didn't he follow you when you signaled?"

"How the hell do I know," Terry shouted angrily. "Maybe he figured he could do the rest of the bolts himself and cut it too fine. I just don't know. He wasn't much on following orders, though, I can tell you that."

"What's it like down there?"

"Bad," Terry yelled, "the weight of her cargo's gradually crushing her superstructure. The passageway and the main salon were tarted up with a lot of gingerbread, and all that crap's coming loose because the bulkheads are buckling. There's about two inches of silt all over everything and it clouds up if you look at it crossways. It's as bad as I've seen."

"How do I get into the passageway?"

"Follow the line down. We're moored to the railing beside the main deck entrance. We ran a lifeline in from there."

"All right," I nodded, pulling

on my neoprene helmet. "I'm going down. I'll need a backup."

"I'm coming," Terry said, "my gear's—"

"No," Bauer said, "Baggers can go down."

"Now look, Charlie—" Terry began.

"Knock it off, dammit!" I interrupted. "I don't give a rip who follows me down, just so somebody's there with a line when I come out. And move it. If we get caught out here in that blow we'll all wind up swimming home. Charlie, gimme a hand with my damn tanks!"

The dark water of Huron Bay closed over me in a soft green explosion. The weight of the tank harness disappeared into neutral buoyance, and I felt only the mild drag of the weight belt as I safety-checked my regulator, then found the half-inch nylon mooring line that trailed from the *Kidd* to infinity below.

I began to swim slowly down along the line, gliding gently through a murky green fog, pausing every fifteen feet or so to swallow hard and pinch the bridge of my nose below the mask to adjust my ears to the pressure change. Visibility was especially poor because of the rough weather above, and after the first fifty feet I couldn't see the boats above any more, or

anything else below, only the nylon line, faint as a thread, leading down into the haze. There were a few fish, of course, small and indistinct, darting through the green mist, most of them moving downward with me, a sure sign of a serious storm coming on the surface.

At a hundred feet I paused at the deflated inner tube Terry'd snubbed into the line as a shock absorber. I cleared my ears, then did a quick doublecheck of my equipment, for safety and to remind myself that I was in an alien, hostile environment now, no matter how enchanting it was. It's a game all divers play. Deep water, like the Sirens of old, can lure you on in a thousand ways, but there's only one way you can ever truly belong down here. The *Queen's* way. And now Harvey's.

I left the inner tube and continued down. At this depth the temperature had already dropped to ten degrees Centigrade and was still falling. My Viking suit, so bulky on the surface, was sleek as a second skin now, form-fitted by the pressure. A wet suit would compress to the thickness of a plastic garbage bag at this depth, and be just about as useful. Suddenly I instinctively grabbed the line, startled by a dark shape looming out of the murk below, huge and formless,

stretching away beneath me as far as I could see. A great fish glimpsed from above. The keel of the *Queen of Lorraine*.

She was upside down, her stern buried in the ooze. Her forward hull, supported by her crushed stacks, towered above the lake bed like a mountain. Patches of moss adhered to her metal skin, giving her a scrofulous, unhealthy look, but other than that, I could see no rust, no deterioration. She was frozen in time, unchanged since that terrible November night when she'd been mortally wounded by the bow of the *Halmstad* and plunged to the bottom, only minutes from the sanctuary of the north bay shore.

I switched on my helmet lamp and the huge vessel instantly disappeared as the light haloed in the turbid water around me, limiting visibility to eight or ten feet. The *Queen* reappeared moments later as I followed the line down past the gash in her side. It hardly seemed big enough to have killed such a giant ship, no more than fifteen inches across at its widest point, but the angle of collision was such that when the captain swung her into that last desperate dash for the beach, her own speed had forced the water through the gap in a torrent. And she'd rolled. And died. And yet she seemed so untouched by

time that she might have lurched to the lake bottom only hours ago, not twenty years.

I found Harvey's swim fins tied neatly to the main deck rail a few feet from the grappling hook at the end of the *Kidd's* mooring line. A second, even more slender line, led from the railing across the deck, and disappeared through an open bulkhead door.

It was an odd feeling to look down from the main deck at the bridge and wheelhouse below. The *Queen's* masts were buried in the muck and her stacks had collapsed, but her superstructure was otherwise undamaged, supported fifteen or twenty feet above the lake bed.

A flicker of movement below caught my eye. The wheelhouse door was moving, swinging gently in the current. The area around the doorlatch was dented, and the scratches on the metal were still bright. That hadn't happened twenty years before. The marks were fresh.

I slipped my flippers off and tied them beside Harvey's, a cave diving technique that would tell whoever followed me down that I was inside the wreck. The fins would be useless in there anyway. You have to move very slowly in a wreck; a snagged hose or a bang on the head can finish you, and flip-

pers only roil up the silt, making visibility worse.

I tied the end of my own lifeline next to Terry's. It would unwind automatically from the safety reel on my belt. I would follow Terry's line in, but I didn't know what was on the other end. And apparently it hadn't helped Harvey much.

Keeping one hand on Terry's line, I swam cautiously toward the open doorway. The weight of the great ship with her cargo of steel looming over me made me even more aware of the pressure at this depth. Every seam of my clothing, every wrinkle, would leave a welt on my skin that wouldn't fade for hours. Even sound is compressed in deep water. The rumble of a passing freighter would whine like a buzz saw down here, and the normally comforting burble of your breathing regulator is strangled to a squeak. Or a scream.

The doorway was alive with motion. Dogfish, dozens of them, three to four feet long, their ugly tentacled heads too large for their slimy, leather-skinned bodies. With a storm coming, the wreck would be infested with them. They're harmless, their rows of tiny teeth dangerous only to crayfish, but they trail you through the murk like clumsy submarine zombies, inhaling the silt in your wake.

I hate the damn things.

A rush of anger surged through me like an electric current, anger at myself for letting Charlie Bauer talk me into this, at Harvey for getting himself killed, at the captain of the Swede freighter for ramming the *Queen* in the first place.

I pushed through the doorway, ignoring the bumps and brushes of the dogfish as they lumbered awkwardly out of my way. I'd entered some sort of anteroom. Metal stairways led up—or rather down, now—to the bridge, and to the engine room and cargo holds above. I followed the lifeline through a second bulkhead doorway and stopped.

Christ. What a mess.

I was in the ship's central passageway, a long narrow hall that ran its full length. The *Queen* was the flagship of the Deveraux line, a freighter but with lavish accommodations for company officers and their guests, though fortunately she'd carried no passengers the night she sank. Her steel bulkheads had been paneled in lacquered hardwood with ornate light fixtures every ten feet or so, but the weight of her cargo bearing down from above had buckled the walls enough to tear it all loose. The fixtures dangled from the walls like grappling hooks, panels and furring strips stuck

out at odd angles like jackstraws, each with its own row of protruding nails. Most of the cabin doors had either popped from their hinges or splintered in half. Overhead, long strips of hardwood flooring had given way, hanging down like spiked tentacles. And through it all swam the dogfish, their greedy mouths sucking in the muck Terry and Harvey had churned up earlier.

Terry was right. This was as bad as I'd seen, too. And if Harvey hadn't been somewhere forward near the end of that lifeline, I wouldn't have gone another inch. But he was. And Terry'd made it in and out in one piece.

I checked the time. Ten minutes left on one tank, a full fifteen on the other. Plenty of time. No excuse there. Cursing silently, I began to swim down the hall following Terry's line, promising myself that if I lived through this I was going to beat the living bejesus out of Charlie Bauer with his own nightstick, providing I could figure a way to tie him up first, of course.

The hallway wasn't quite as bad as it looked. The obstacles, vicious though they were, were farther apart than they'd appeared from the doorway, and as long as I moved slowly, I was able to work my way past them. I covered the first thirty feet or

so with no problems. But then everything began to disappear.

There was a dark cloud of roiled silt at what I assumed must be the end of the passageway. Dogfish were moving through it, feeding, and Terry's lifeline led into it, so there had to be something beyond, probably the salon. But I couldn't see a thing in there. Terrific.

I slowed my progress to a crawl, inching my way along the line into the cloud. Visibility diminished rapidly until I could see no farther than the length of my arm, maybe less. I could only see the lifeline, occasional pieces of debris, and the dogfish as they blundered into me out of the murk. And then I reached the end of the lifeline.

It was tied around a doorknob at the end of the hall, holding the door open. I felt a surprising rush of relief, both at finding the door, and finding it open. Maybe Bauer's suspicion was contagious, but I think I'd been half-afraid it might be closed.

The interior of the salon was even more turbid than the passageway. It was beginning to look as if Harvey'd made a basic, puddle diver's mistake. He'd lost the door. My problem was, the main salon was a large room and several suites opened into it. He could be anywhere in there.

First things first. They'd been working on the dedication plaque, and it was directly opposite the door. I snubbed a loop of my own lifeline over Terry's on the doorknob to take up the slack, and started in.

The room was a shambles, furniture, flooring, bookshelves all tangled and smashed on the ceiling below me, the whole jumble covered with a fine layer of sediment that roiled and swirled around me as I swam slowly above it. A shattered crystal chandelier glittered crazily below for a moment, scattering and reflecting the light from my helmet lamp like a pool of diamonds.

I had to admit the plaque was impressive, a three foot square of hammered brass listing the company's officers, ship's captains of the Deveraux fleet, and with a bas-relief of the *Queen* herself. It must have cost a bundle even in 1926. It had been secured to the wall with a dozen brass bolts. Eight of them had been removed and placed neatly in a bag on the ceiling below, and a ninth was halfway out.

But no Harvey. Not a sign of him. I checked my time again. It had taken four minutes to get to the *Queen*, four more in the passageway, sixteen minutes total transit time then, minimum, on thirty minutes of air. Soon. I'd have to find him soon.

I tried to concentrate, to put myself in his place. I've lost the door, I'm running out of air, I'm— His light. His air would be long gone, but his helmet lamp should still be working. I reeled in a few feet of lifeline, pulling myself back to the chandelier in the center of the room. Then I turned off my helmet lamp. And waited.

After a minute or so the walls began to glow faintly, and I could make out the pallid green gleam of the portholes, four on each side of the room. And off to my right, a brighter yellowish glow. I took a bearing on it as best I could, switched my own lamp back on, and swam cautiously toward the light.

He was kneeling against the outer wall, his mask pressed against the porthole glass. Maybe he'd been trying to get it open, although it was too small to get through, even without his tanks. Or maybe he'd watched Terry's and Bagger's lights gliding away up the mooring line, leaving him behind, or . . .

It didn't matter now. I tugged him gently around. He stared at me through his mask, but there was no life in his eyes, no expression. He was dead. His equipment was all right, no signs of violence. I didn't expect any, but I knew Bauer would ask, so I checked.

Time to go.

I tweaked the valve on his flotation vest, allowing just enough inflation to make him buoyant, then unwound a piece of lifeline from his reel, the line he hadn't bothered to use, and tethered his body to my weight-belt. I tried to get a fix on the door, but the water was just too cloudy, I couldn't see three feet. So I unhooked my lifeline and began to reel it in, following it toward the door.

It was slow going. Harvey dragged behind me like a sea anchor. Dead weight. Since I couldn't see well and Harvey couldn't see at all, he kept bumping into things. Twice he got hung up on dangling flooring strips, but I managed to pull him free by tugging gently on the line. Then, as we neared the door, his regulator hose snagged in a tangle of wiring and I had to stop and work it loose, wasting precious time and slicing my right palm open in the process. Cursing my luck, and Harvey, and this damn death-trap of a ship, I started moving toward the door again— And suddenly I was staring into a face straight out of hell.

His skin was bloated and gray, his blind eyes milk white, teeth bared in a grimace of agony. His uniform jacket had been gouged through, revealing a terrible wound, clotted with

gore and bits of protruding bone.

And I panicked. And ran.

Or tried to. I scrambled backwards, a scream strangling in my mask, shoving Harvey aside, clawing my way mindlessly through the wreckage on the ceiling, so shattered by terror I even forgot to swim. But Harvey's corpse hooked on the wiring again, and jerked me sidelong into a jumble of furniture. A searing blaze of pain exploded above my heart as something ripped through my suit and deep into my chest. Bone deep. Instantly, instinctively, I knew I was badly hurt. Maybe finished. Icy water surged through the puncture, hammering what little breath I had out of me like a second blow. My consciousness was out of control, skittering about like a cockroach on a hot griddle. *Trapped*, it was screaming, *it's dead, it's dead, get away, you're trapped*. I grasped the lance in my chest with both hands and pulled it out.

A table leg. A splintered table leg. I stared at it with no comprehension at all as blood began seeping through the rip in my suit, clouding the filthy water. I'd crashed into a broken table and speared myself. On a table leg. And I was going to die. I'd seen a body. And panicked. A body. Nothing more. He was dead. And dead is dead.

And now he'd killed me, too.

No. I'd killed me. I panicked. And wounded myself. And tore my suit. But worse than that, I'd dropped my lifeline. I was going to die down here. Like Harvey. Like . . . the other one. Because I'd panicked. Because I'd lost the door. Like an amateur. Like a goddamn puddle diver. I came down after Harvey, and now-somebody would have to come down for me. That should have made me angry, but somehow it didn't seem important. What little I could see of the room was flickering and fading as the blood oozed from my chest and my awareness dimmed and I began to fall, down and down into December.

Someone tapped me on the shoulder.

The jolt of pure horror that shot through me brought me instantly awake as I tried to pull away. But it wasn't *him*. It was only a dogfish. A dogfish. And I wasn't dead, yet. Almost, though. Almost.

The wound in my chest was going numb, chilled by the icy water. It didn't hurt as much now, and I was glad of that. Maybe dying wouldn't be so bad, only . . .

I didn't want to die in here. In this terrible place that killed Harvey with the silt and the dogfish and that *thing*. Out in the hall would be better. They'd

know I tried if I could just make it out into the hall. I came down to take Harvey out of here. I should at least do that much. Maybe I'd be able to swim better without him, but if I was afraid to die in this place, then he must be, too. It would be wrong to leave him behind. And Harvey was trying to help. He'd floated free of the wiring all by himself.

I checked my pressure gauge, but I couldn't make sense of the numbers. It didn't matter. We were lost anyway. Somehow we had to find the door. Maybe I could find a wall and follow it around, but I wasn't sure how big the room was, and there were other doors. If we went into another room . . .

Or maybe I should just find a porthole for one last look at the world like Harvey did. The portholes. That seemed to make sense. If I could find the portholes . . .

Switching off my helmet lamp was very hard. Maybe the hardest thing I've ever done. But I did it. And we waited in the dark. And in a while I could see the pale glow of the portholes again. Four of them to my right, four more, much fainter, ahead and to the left. And a dark area in between.

I fixed the dark area in my mind, switched my helmet lamp back on, and swam slowly to-

ward it, with Harvey following faithfully behind. And we found the plaque. And the plaque was directly opposite the door.

I explained the situation carefully to Harvey. We had to swim straight. My chest hurt terribly and my right arm wasn't working right. He had to help me. And if we ran into that thing again, we mustn't be afraid this time. He couldn't hurt us now. Dead is dead. But we had to swim straight.

We placed our feet against the plaque and pushed off, swimming for the door. And we saw the thing again. A couple of times. Only he wasn't as scary now. He wanted us to wait. He didn't like it in here, either. He didn't belong in here. He wanted to go with us. But we couldn't take him along. I'll come back for you, I said. I promise. But we can't stop now. We have to swim straight.

And we did. Or Harvey did, anyway. I banged into a wall, but Harvey drifted past me, pulling me through the doorway into the passageway.

It was much worse than before. Harvey kept stopping, banging into things, getting hung up on nails. I told him to stop it, but he wouldn't listen. So I jerked him free and dragged him along.

But we were too slow. My regulator was already choking off

when we made it to the anteroom. I tried to slow my breathing to stretch it but it was too late. Too late. And I yelled at Harvey that we were out of air. We had to get up now. And as soon as we cleared the outer door, I hugged him close and twisted the valve of his flotation vest wide open, and he surged toward the surface, carrying me toward the light, faster and faster.

And then Terry was there. He had his back to me, staring out the window into the dark. I started to ask him if Harvey was okay, but my chest hurt too much.

And then it was afternoon. And a nurse was there. And she asked me how I felt. I said I felt like I'd been eaten by a bear and shat by the side of the road. And she smiled and left, shaking her head. And in a little while Charlie Bauer came in.

"Hey, Mitch," he said, tossing his uniform cap on the foot of the bed, "how ya doin'? Gonna live?"

"I don't know," I said honestly. "What happened?"

"What happened? You scared me out of ten years' growth is what. You came bustin' up outa the water with Addison's body like some kinda guided missile, bleedin' like..." he ran a freckled paw through his thin-

ning hair. "Mitch, what the hell went on down there? Christ, they needed twenty stitches to sew you up. You had the bends from comin' up too fast. . . . You damn near died. What happened to you?"

"It was a mess down there," I said simply. "I found Harvey, but I lost the door myself. And I rammed into something. A table leg, I think. Stupid. Really stupid."

"Is that what happened to Addison, you think? He just lost track of the door and couldn't get out?"

"I've had a lot more experience than he had, and I lost it."

"But you got out," Charlie said.

"We got lucky," I said. "Harvey helped me find it."

"Yeah, um," he said uncomfortably, "I guess."

"It's okay," I smiled. "I'm not gonna wig out on you. Things got a little crazy down there at the end is all."

"Yeah, I imagine they did. Look, I almost hate to ask you this but— You kept saying there was somebody else down there. That we had to get him out."

"There was another body," I nodded slowly. "One of the crew from the *Queen*."

"I thought that must be it," he said. "You seemed pretty positive about it. 'Course, you also said he talked to you."

"Did I? Well, maybe he did. Maybe after the storm passes we can . . ." I trailed off, confused, staring at the window. It was late afternoon. And the sun was shining. Charlie was watching me intently. "How, ah, how long have I been out?" I asked.

"Three days. You lost a lot of blood. The storm blew out yesterday. I sent Bill Atkins and a team from the Coast Guard Auxiliary down to the *Queen* this morning. Didn't Terry tell you?"

"I didn't talk to him. I mean, he was here, but . . ."

"He stayed with you almost the whole time. He was about half crazy himself. Said if you died he'd kill me for sendin' you down there. I think he meant it, too."

"Did Atkins find the body?"

"No, they didn't," he sighed. "They didn't find anything hardly. The *Queen's* cargo apparently busted loose in the storm and smashed down through her decks. There's nothing left down there but the hull and twenty thousand tons of rolled steel buried in the bottom."

"No," I said softly, "that's not right. I said I'd get him out."

"You, ah, you better get some sleep," Charlie said, picking up his hat. "Look, I just want you to know I'm sorry as hell about

this, Mitch. If I'd had any idea . . . Anyway, I owe you one. A big one. I won't forget it."

"I know," I said. "I won't forget, either. I promised."

Terry came in a little while after Bauer left. He said he was leaving, something to do with Harvey, but I was groggy and it didn't make much sense.

Two more days passed before I felt human again. I still felt a little wobbly, but I'd had enough of hospital rooms. And besides, I had unfinished business.

I called Sharon Hess, one of the barmaids at the Nest, and asked her to drive me to the Deveraux Institute. She gave me a hard time but she agreed after I promised to go home to bed afterwards. I said I'd call a cab when I finished, but she said she'd wait and I didn't have the energy to argue.

I like the Deveraux Institute. It's a combination research library and nautical museum that occupies most of a city block in downtown Huron Harbor, land that Jason's father had donated as a park fifty years ago. It's a pleasant building, modern, open, with a lot of glass but with plenty of wood showing in its counters and shelves, too. And even in the library section, the walls have huge displays of his-

torical artifacts of Great Lakes shipping, everything from canoe paddles to a cross-section of the *Edmund Fitzgerald's* turbine.

I spent ten minutes with the library's data terminal, making up a list, then took it to the counter. The girl on duty, young, with a complexion problem and a mouthful of braces, frowned at the list.

"Are you a historian?" she asked. "Accredited with the Institute, I mean?"

"My name's Mitchell," I said. "I'm doing some recovery work for Mr. Deveraux."

"Oh," she said, brightening, "I'm sure it'll be all right then. Some of these books are restricted access, but . . ." She disappeared into the stacks, still muttering to herself.

I glanced around the room while I waited. I'd been here often, of course, but I'd never really realized how *many* artifacts they had on display.

"Here you are," she said, placing a small stack of books on the counter. "I'm afraid most of these are restricted. You'll have to study them here."

"No problem," I said. "I wonder if you could help me with something else, though. If the Institute acquired a new artifact, say a large bronze plaque, maybe three feet square, where would it be displayed?"

She looked at me blankly.

"I'm sure I wouldn't know," she said. "There are several large storerooms in the basement filled with stuff we haven't room to display now."

"I see," I said, picking up my books.

"They still acquire things all the time, though," she added helpfully. "The family's quite wealthy, you know."

"Yes," I said, "I've heard that."

His name was Stanley Joseph Maychek. I found a picture of him, posing stiffly with a group of company officers at the Soo Locks in 1964. He looked much younger and healthier than when I'd seen him last. He was the second mate on the *Queen of Lorraine*, signed aboard in 'sixty-three. He had a wife and two kids in Saginaw, and parents still living, or at least they were in 'sixty-eight when the *Queen* went down. His picture on the page blurred and swam before my eyes for a moment.

"I'm sorry," I said softly, "I'm very sorry."

The librarian was staring at me, then quickly looked away. It didn't matter. His name was Stanley Joseph Maychek. And he'd told me the truth.

I didn't return to work at the Crow's Nest for a few days. I lazed around on the beach behind my cottage, soaking

up the pale August sun, listening to the seagulls and the surf, feeling my strength gradually seeping back. But somehow it wasn't as tranquil as it should have been. There seemed to be a sense of urgency in the relentless pounding of the waves, especially at night, when sleep was hard to come by, troubled by dreams of chaos I couldn't quite recall in the morning.

I went back to work on Thursday, but I felt uncomfortable tending bar and mixing with the customers, so I spent most of my time in the office, catching up on paperwork. Charlie Bauer came by to see me the first day, but we didn't have much to say to each other, and he didn't stay long. And on Saturday afternoon, Terry rapped lightly on the door and stuck his head in.

"Hey, Mitch, glad to see you're still alive. How ya doin'?"

"I'm all right. Actually, I think I look better than you do."

"You may be right," he said, slumping into one of the captain's chairs. "I've been runnin' my ass off. Sorry I haven't been around sooner, but Jason asked me to accompany Addison's body back down to Miami and talk to his folks. I wasn't crazy about the idea, but Jason can be a pretty persuasive guy."

"Jason?" I said, raising my eyebrows. "Are you two on a first name basis now?"

"Ah, yeah, we are, as a matter of fact," he said, trying not to look smug, and failing. "I've been spending some time out at the estate. Andrea's been pretty bummed out by this whole thing. In fact, that's one reason I stopped by. She wants to fly down to Acapulco this weekend and I guess I'm gonna tag along." He tossed a key ring on the desk. "The marina's closed till Monday. Can you see the *Kidd* gets beached and stored for me? I'd appreciate it."

"It's a little early in the season to be packing it in, isn't it? What about your charters?"

"I canceled 'em all and cut Baggers loose. I, ah, I expect I'll be pretty busy for a while."

"With Andrea," I said. It wasn't a question.

"Looks like that's the way it's going. No hard feelings, I hope?"

"About you and Andrea?" I said. "No. Not at all. In fact, I think we should have a drink on it. You want to do the honors?"

"Absolutely," he grinned, crossing to the liquor cabinet and pouring two snifters of Courvoisier. "Hey, I'm really glad you're taking it well. Tell you the truth, I was a little worried. I mean, we been friends a long time, but I knew how you felt about her, and, anyway—" he handed me the glass. "You're all right, Mitch. You always were."

I stood up, facing him, and raised my glass. "A toast," I said formally. "To Stanley Joseph Maychek. God rest his troubled soul."

"To..." Terry paused with his glass halfway to his lips. "To who? Who the hell's Stanley—whatever?"

"You don't recognize the name?" I asked. "You should. He's a friend of yours. He's the man who helped you kill Harvey."

He went suddenly pale, as though he'd been struck. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about Stanley J. Maychek, the second officer of the *Queen*. The guy I met in the salon. You should have warned me, Terry. I might've been okay if you'd warned me."

"You were raving about a body when we pulled you out," he nodded, "but I didn't see one. Christ, the way the room was silted up, there could've been an army in there and I wouldn't have seen 'em."

"But you knew Maychek was there," I said. "You put him there to guard the door to keep Harvey from getting out. Only he didn't belong in there, Terry. He said so."

"He said . . . ?" Terry echoed, staring at me.

"It doesn't matter," I shrugged. "I would have figured it out anyway. He was the second mate, and there'd been

a collision. I don't know where he was when she rolled, maybe down in the hold checking the damage, or maybe aft warning the crew, but the one place he wouldn't have been was all the way forward in the passenger salon. The room's a dead end and there weren't any passengers. My guess is he was on duty in the pilot house. I noticed the door'd been pried open. Is that where you found him?"

"It, ah, doesn't really matter now, you know," he said carefully. "There's almost nothing left of the *Queen*. No way to . . . prove anything. Have you talked to anybody about this?"

"I'm talking to somebody about it now," I said. "Truth is, I'm worried about you, Terry. You don't look good. Murder's a little out of your line. I don't think you're going to handle it well at all."

"It wasn't murder," he said, tossing off his brandy with a single swallow. "It was a joke. Or it was supposed to be."

"Strange place for a joke."

"I didn't say it was a good joke. It—went wrong, that's all." He fumbled a pack of cigarettes out of his jacket, extracted one, and lit up, pulling the smoke deep into his lungs. Odd, I'd never seen him smoke before, him or any other diver. We re-breathe too much of our own air.

"Anyway, you're right," he nodded, "we did find the body earlier this year, in the wheelhouse. Me and Baggers."

"And you didn't bring it up?"

"How were we supposed to explain it? We had no permit to dive on the *Queen*. We could've wound up in jail. We were scavenging 'jewelry' out of the pilot house so we moved the body into the last cabin off the hall, next to the salon."

"And later you decided to use it to play a not-so-practical joke? Like in high school? Only two hundred feet down?"

"Dammit, you didn't really know Addison," Terry flared. "He was a fourteen carat phony. Mr. Bigbucks, only with Andrea's money. Just because he chartered me for a month I was supposed to jump every time he said 'frog.' Especially when Andrea was around. He'd snuffle after her like a goddamn lapdog and then expect me to call him boss. Christ, he wasn't man enough to shine my gear. He was nothin' but a puddle diver, and a lousy one at that."

"You killed him because he was a puddle diver?"

"I didn't kill him at all! He killed himself. Because he panicked. How the hell did I know he'd lose the door? He could have made it out. You did."

"But not without some help from Harvey," I said. "And I

don't believe you were joking around down there, either. There were too many bolts out of the plaque, Terry. Nine of 'em. And you only had twelve minutes of working time in there. Even Jacques Cousteau couldn't jerk nine bolts in twelve minutes. I think you deliberately worked into your safety margin. Harvey was green, he wouldn't notice. Then you slipped away, easy enough to do in that murk. And you shoved Stanley in to guard the door on your way out. And when Harvey realized you were gone and tried to follow, if he found the door at all, he ran into Stanley. And he probably panicked. I sure did. And he hyperventilated, and used up most of his air in just a few seconds. . . . And right then he was a dead man. Even if he'd found the door he had no chance at all. None. And that was no joke, Terry. That was murder."

"Look, I'm sorry as hell about what happened to you down there," Terry said coldly, grinding out his cigarette in the ashtray on my desk, "but I didn't ask you to go down there, Bauer did. So what happened wasn't my fault. And you're wrong about the bolts. We only got three or four out. No more."

"I'm sorry you're going to play it this way," I sighed. "I'd hoped . . . Well, I guess it doesn't

matter." I picked up his key ring and tossed it back to him. "I think you'd better have somebody else look after the *Kidd* for you. Ask a friend."

"Fair enough," he said evenly, "I'll do that. But if I were you I wouldn't talk to anyone else about—"

"I'm afraid it's a little late for that," I said. "Too many people know about it already."

"Like who?"

"You. And me. And Harvey. And Stanley Maychek."

"You really *are* crazy, you know that?"

"Maybe a little," I conceded, "but I know you, Terry. I've known you all your life. You won't be able to handle this. Eventually, it'll destroy you. And I don't think you'll make much of a lapdog either."

"And that's really the bottom line here, isn't it?" he said, his eyes hard, and a bit feverish. "It's Andrea. That's what's really eating you. You're jealous. You never got over her, either. Only you didn't have the guts to go after her and I did. And I'm going to have it all, too. Andrea. Everything. You think I murdered Harvey? Fine. You'd better keep that in mind. And from now on, stay the hell out of my way!"

He stormed out, slamming the door behind him. I watched him through the glass as he

shouldered his way angrily through the afternoon crowd. For a man who had everything, he didn't look very happy.

Or maybe he's right. Maybe I'm just jealous.

But I don't think so. In fact, I hope he gets exactly what he wants. All of it. He's earned it. And he deserves it.

Only I don't think it'll be enough. The girl he really wants doesn't exist any more. She's a mirage, a dream from a long lost golden summer. We all need our dreams, I suppose. The trouble is, that if you hold on to them long enough, and your luck is bad enough . . . sometimes they come true.

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UNSOLVED

by Hubert
Phillips ("Caliban")

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the November issue.

Problems concerning the Colorful Isles will be familiar to you. The Blues, you will recall, invariably tell the truth. The Whites invariably lie. The Pinks tell the truth and lie alternately; but a Pink's first answer may be either truthful or otherwise.

Tom, George, Dick, and Harry—all natives of the Colorful Isles—are seated at a circular table enjoying a modest pint. George is on Tom's left, and Harry on Tom's right.

To them enter Jones, an inquisitive visitor. To each native in turn he puts these three questions (in the same order): (1) "What is the race to which your left-hand neighbor belongs?" (2) "And the chap sitting opposite to you?" (3) "And your right-hand neighbor?" Here are the answers which he receives:

Tom's answers: (1) Blue; (2) Pink; (3) Pink.

George's answers: (1) White; (2) Pink; (3) Pink.

Dick's answers: (1) White; (2) Blue; (3) Pink.

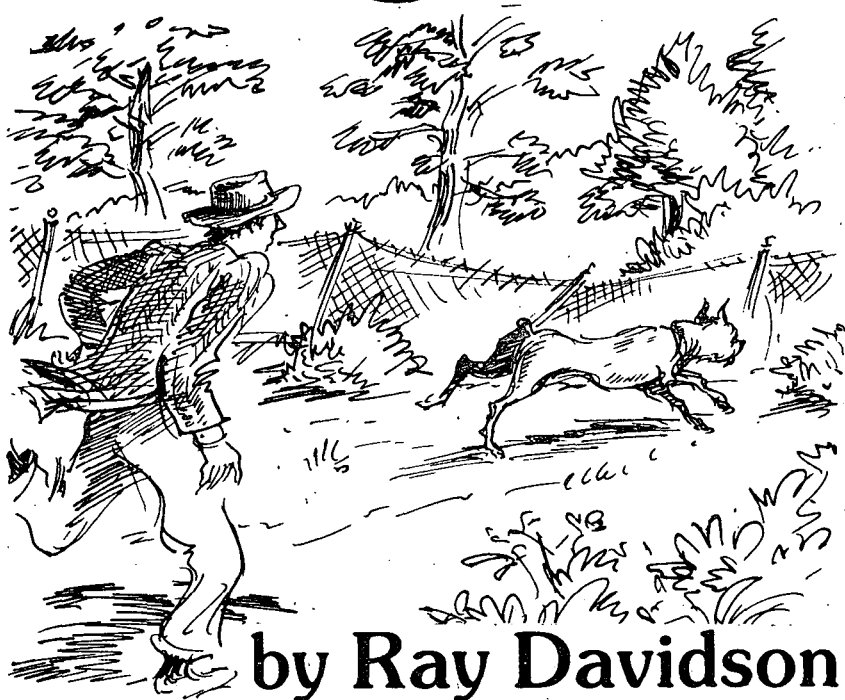
Harry's answers: (1) White; (2) Blue; (3) Pink.

To which race, in fact, does each of the four natives belong?

See page 147 for the solution to the September puzzle.

"Colorful Isles," taken from *My Best Puzzles in Logic & Reasoning* by Hubert Phillips ("Caliban"). Copyright © 1961 by Dover Publications, Inc., New York, N.Y.

A Dog's Life



by Ray Davidson

"Herringbone Tweede — I mean, Harrington Tweede," Herringbone intoned at his speaker phone. He spoke absently at first, his attention still focused on the funnies in the *L.A. Times*. Then he flushed and corrected himself apologetically.

A rich, offensive chuckle assaulted his ear from the phone's speaker. "I prefer blue serge myself," a husky bass voice said, "büt 'chackin ah sun gowt.'"

Tweede sighed. "Nobody pronounces it that badly, Paul," he said. "You're putting me on."

"The basis of all true friend-

ships," Paul Holroyd replied, his voice oozing righteousness.

"Are you calling to practice mauled French at me?"

"Of course not. This is official business," Holroyd said.

Paul Holroyd was with the LAPD, "on the administrative side." He and Tweede had met over food (which was one thing neither of them ever made fun of), found their tastes congenial (without any pun intended), and had become friends. It was an unlikely association. H. Tweede, ex-reporter and current private investigator, was small, thin, intelligent, shy, pleasantly homely, and gentle. Holroyd was large, inclined to surplus weight, boisterous, fleshy-featured, and rude as the devil. It must have been the shared intelligence or an attraction of opposites, Tweede thought.

"You do find missing, er, persons, don't you?" Paul asked.

"I've found a few. Usually, though, it's just a dodge to gather divorce evidence. But you know all this. You want me to find someone?"

"Exactly. I want you to find Greta."

"Greta? Not Greta Garbo, I hope."

"I'm sending over a file."

"But Paul, why me? Your people have got resources I can't even touch. And who's . . ."

"I'll explain this evening at Dingo's. You'll be there?"

"Sure, Paul, but . . ."

"Gotta go, Herringbone. See you."

Tweede sighed again and switched off the phone. He tended to sigh a lot during his conversations with Holroyd, sometimes with forced patience but almost always with a measure of friendly tolerance. The trouble was, he liked Paul Holroyd.

The file arrived a half hour later, delivered by a uniformed employee of the city who glanced blankly around Tweede's shabby office and departed mystified. Tweede opened the envelope and extracted its contents. An eight by ten glossy slipped to the floor face down.

"Greta Gorgeous Countess St. Germaine," the name across the top of the file read. He stooped, retrieved the photo, and stared at the delightfully pug-nosed visage of a magnificent female boxer, clipped ears erect, the mischief of innocent youth in her eye.

"**Y**ou want me to find a dog?" he asked Holroyd over coffee and Danish at Dingo's late that afternoon.

"You read the file?" Holroyd mumbled through a mouthful of pastry. Tweede nodded. "Then

you know this isn't just an ordinary dog," Holroyd continued, swallowing. "That bitch is worth three months of my salary."

Tweede winced. "Keep it clean, Paul," he murmured.

"For your information, Her-ringbone, 'bitch' is the technical term dog fanciers use . . ."

"I know, but you're not a dog fancier."

Holroyd had the grace to look slightly abashed. He shrugged. "Anyway," he went on, "it's a valuable dog and its owners are friends of mine. This is the fourth time she's disappeared. The first three times, it was only a day or two. This time, it's been two weeks."

"Paul, how am I supposed to find a dog that's been missing two whole weeks?" Tweede asked.

Holroyd had just taken another bite of Danish, so there was a slight delay until he reduced it to manageable proportions. "Same way you find humans, I guess," he mumbled.

"Dogs don't have driver's licenses and credit cards," Tweede pointed out. "Anyway, if she's been kidnapped—I mean dog-napped—she won't be running loose. She could be anywhere."

"You've got a 'last address,' haven't you?" Holroyd asked testily. "And a description. Even a picture! What more do you

want? Look, Sylvia expects me early tonight. I gotta go."

He rose, patting his lips with a little paper napkin and completely missing the cluster of frosting grains at the corner of his mouth.

"This is asking a lot," Tweede said.

"That's what friends are for," Holroyd replied, grinning now that he was sure Tweede would do it.

"I usually work for a fee," Tweede remarked bitterly at the big man's retreating back. Holroyd paused and turned.

"Didn't I tell you?" he asked innocently. "I guess I forgot. There's a two thousand dollar reward for information leading to recovery. I'll see that you get it. Good coffee, dolly," he added to the waitress at the counter as he passed.

The waitress, whose name was Irene, said, "Yeah," without looking up from the *Inquirer* spread out on the counter in front of her.

Tweede sighed and drank his coffee. Holroyd had eaten all the pastries.

Following Holroyd's implied suggestion—he would have started there in any case—Tweede began by visiting Greta's owners, a Mr. and Mrs. Harvey (and Sheila) Bettinjohn. They lived

in a stratum of life with which he was not even remotely familiar. For example, the guard at the electronically controlled gate, a quarter of a mile from their Orange County home, phoned up to confirm before admitting Tweede's battered Volkswagen to the grounds.

"I really do not understand it," Mrs. Bettinjohn said. "She's usually an affectionate and obedient bitch. A bit playful, of course, as boxers are, but she seemed quite content. We've given her everything she could possibly want."

"Mr. Holroyd says she has disappeared before," Tweede prompted.

"She has," Mr. Bettinjohn said. "But you must understand, officer, that dogs do sometimes go off on their own."

"Males, yes," Tweede said ignoring the "officer." If Holroyd hadn't told them who he was, it wasn't up to him to spill the beans. "I thought, though, it was not so usual in the case of females."

"Males more often, certainly, but, er, females occasionally."

"You don't confine her, then?" Tweede asked.

"She has the run of the house and estate," Mrs. Bettinjohn said. "Within reason, of course."

"We have noticed one thing," Mr. Bettinjohn said slowly. "I don't really know if it means

anything but, well, you must judge for yourself. Each time before she disappears, she seems quite uncharacteristically excited."

"She's a playful dog," Mrs. Bettinjohn objected.

"No more than other boxers her age," her husband replied. "Each time before she leaves, she runs about, whines, practically climbs up in your lap."

"Your lap, Harvey," Mrs. Bettinjohn said. "Certainly not mine."

"Of course not, my dear. She wouldn't dare."

Mrs. Bettinjohn looked daggers at her husband for a moment, then shrugged. Men were, after all, completely impossible to understand and not worth the trouble at that.

Tweede hastened to intervene. "Anything happen to bring these attacks on? Anything unusual?" he asked.

Bettinjohn shook his head. "Nothing unusual," he said.

"You dropped that book, Harvey," his wife murmured.

"Come now, Sheila. What could dropping a book have to do with the dog running away?" he objected. Women were apparently no more comprehensible than men.

She had meant to nettle him. Now she had to defend her comment. "Well, Greta always has been sensitive to loud noises. I

know it startled me. In fact, I felt quite faint for a moment."

"You've never felt faint in your life," Harvey said. "Anyway, my dear, it isn't 'germaine.'" He smiled a smug, self-satisfied little smile, but Tweede doubted if Mrs. Bettinjohn had caught the pun.

"Then there's really nothing more you can tell me about the dog's disappearance?" he asked.

Bettinjohn shrugged: "I'm afraid not, officer. She gets excited, she goes out, she disappears."

"Where did you get the dog, Mr. Bettinjohn?" Tweede asked.

"From a breeder in Glendale, a Miss Fedders."

"We've called her, of course. She hasn't seen Greta," Mrs. Bettinjohn added.

"Still..." Tweede murmured his goodbyes. Neither of them saw him to the door. There are limits, Tweede supposed.

The Two Fedders Kennels were not easy to locate. He might have passed the house a dozen times without seeing the modest little sign or realizing it was more than just another well-kept residence along a suburban street. The grounds behind the house were surprisingly extensive, however, and even more surprisingly wooded. The kennels and runs were large and clean.

"Yes, of course I remember Greta," Miss Fedders said, "and I don't understand it. She certainly didn't use to run off. An affectionate, obedient dog, well-trained, and not the least neurotic."

"Neurotic?" Tweede was intrigued.

"These highly inbred dogs are quite frequently quirky, you know," Miss Fedders explained. "Easily upset, intelligent but emotional. They're just like people in some ways. But Greta isn't like that at all—oh, she's intelligent, but quite placid for a boxer. Of course she's spayed. That helps."

Tweede frowned. "Doesn't that detract..."

"...from her value? Not as much as you'd think," Miss Fedders said. "It's the males that earn the money. Of course she'll have no litters, but Mr. and Mrs. Bettinjohn didn't want to breed her. They just wanted a dog and, of course, it had to be one they could brag about. I'm sorry, but she has not shown up here."

"The picture you've given me isn't quite the same as the one Mr. and Mrs. Bettinjohn gave," Tweede said. "They described her as excitable and lively."

"It's probably a relative thing, Mr.—Tweede, is it? Boxers on the whole are an inquisitive, friendly breed. They like people

and tend to seek attention. Greta is less active than the average, but someone who doesn't know dogs . . ."

"How long has she been, uh, neutered?" Tweede asked.

"I have no idea."

"But didn't you . . ."

"Oh, no! Greta isn't one of my dogs," Miss Fedders said. "I took her on a year ago from a Mr.—what was his name, now? Greenmeadows? Wait, I'll look it up." She departed toward the house while Tweede allowed a large, rust-brown male boxer to lick his hand through the mesh of the run fence.

"That's enough, Roscoe," Miss Fedders said cheerfully when she returned. The dog trotted obediently off. "It's Goodpasture. Mr. Clarence Goodpasture in Brentwood."

Tweede considered. "Tell me, Miss Fedders, how would a dog like Greta respond to a sudden loud noise?"

"Most dogs wouldn't like it," Miss Fedders replied promptly. "It's a regularly used trick of training. I use a rolled-up newspaper slapped against the side of my leg. Of course, some dogs are less bothered than others. Greta, now! As I said, placid. I noticed that she seemed more intrigued by the slap of the paper than alarmed. But thunder sent her cowering. She doesn't like thunder. A lot of dogs don't."

"Do you have an address for Mr. Goodpasture?" Tweede asked.

She gave it to him and he departed, followed by a single, sharp bark of farewell from Roscoe.

"So, you needn't pursue the matter further," Mrs. Bettinjohn said. Tweede had called to report his progress, only to find that Greta had come home again. "She's dreadfully thin and was quite dirty, but she's unharmed."

Tweede caught himself about to ask where she had been.

"I asked her where she had been, but of course she couldn't tell me," Mrs. Bettinjohn continued, laughing archly. "So I suppose we'll never know. We do thank you for your trouble, and we'll tell Mr. Holroyd how kind and helpful you've been."

"Thank you," Tweede hung up. Then, driven by a nagging intuition, he went out to Brentwood and rang the Goodpasture doorbell. There was no electronic gate with a guard, but the house might have held a small regiment in comfort. The Bettinjohns were new money and trendy architecture. Goodpasture was old money and solid, uncompromising Victorian, or perhaps Edwardian, substance.

Mr. Goodpasture received him diffidently.

"My mother gave her to me," he said, "but really, after Mother moved back to Marreneck, I simply couldn't keep her. She needed exercise and attention, and I—it was just too exhausting."

Mr. Goodpasture looked as though anything beyond a deep breath would be too exhausting. In fact, he looked positively ill. His cheeks were hollow and his eyes tired and sunken. Tweede felt a strong impulse to lead the man to a sofa and ply him with restoratives. He repressed it. When not ill, Goodpasture was evidently a goodlooking man. His features were small and neat and regular. His short hair was thick, about halfway between blond and brown, and rather tightly curled so that it stood out all over his head in a kind of miniature African halo.

"And you haven't seen her recently?" Tweede asked.

"Oh, is that what it's all about? No, not since the dog lady came and got her. She wouldn't come back here anyway. She was really Mother's dog—that is, she belonged to me but she seemed to think Mother belonged to her, if you know what I mean. After Mother went back east again, she didn't seem very happy here."

"Tell me something," Tweede

urged. "Was Greta a very excitable dog?"

"Oh, no! She's—at least, she was—very placid. Playful, sometimes, but not excitable. Seldom barked unless it was to come in or go out, you know."

"Were there things she was frightened of?"

"Not that I remember. She was curious. I remember she spent about twenty minutes exploring a horse once that someone had ridden over here—a friend of mine, actually. He has since married and moved away somewhere. The horse was a lot more nervous than Greta was."

"Then things didn't startle her?"

"Things?"

"Oh, a cat jumping out . . ."

"She generally ignored cats."

" . . . or loud noises?"

"Loud noises?" Goodpasture seemed faintly puzzled and very tired.

"Well, thunder, say, or a car backfiring," Tweede explained.

"Oh. No, not that I remember, Mr., er, Tweede, is it? You keep saying 'was.' Is Greta dead?" The idea seemed to distress him.

"Not that I know of," Tweede replied cheerfully. "She was alive this morning."

"Oh. Oh, that's good. I wouldn't like to think . . . But I thought you said she'd run away."

"Several times," Tweede said.

"But this morning she came back."

"Oh. Then, why . . ."

"Why am I taking up your time like this? I'm curious about why she runs away. Her owners would like to know."

Goodpasture sighed. "She never used to," he said. "Maybe she doesn't like her new home. Anyway, it isn't that she comes back here. We haven't seen her at all."

"We?"

Goodpasture waved a hand vaguely toward the great outdoors to indicate the two acres or so of wooded park that surrounded the house. "There's a man who takes care of the grounds. His wife cooks and cleans. They live in town somewhere. If they'd seen her, I'm sure they'd have said something."

"Probably," Tweede agreed. "Well, thank you, Mr. Goodpasture."

"You're welcome, Mr., er, Tweede."

Tweede had left his car at the foot of the drive. Goodpasture watched him all the way down from the doorway, then nodded and fluttered a hand before Tweede drove off.

"You'd like to borrow Greta?" Mrs. Bettinjohn repeated. "I—I don't understand."

"It's just for a little experiment. We have a theory about why she runs away, but we need to test it," Tweede said.

Mrs. Bettinjohn glanced uncertainly at her husband.

"I don't see why not," Bettinjohn said. "It would be nice to know, Sheila."

Mrs. Bettinjohn shrugged. "Well . . ." she said doubtfully.

"I'll take very good care of her," Tweede assured her.

"I hope so," Mrs. Bettinjohn said. "Greta is a very valuable dog."

Greta, her back end wagging in lieu of tail, seemed quite willing. She jumped into Tweede's VW without hesitation and sat in the passenger seat, looking about curiously at the traffic. Tweede drove to Brentwood, parked the car in a winding wooded street without sidewalks about a quarter of a mile from the Goodpasture house, and got out. Greta sat in the car, her head swiveling to keep him in view. Then, as he stood without moving behind the car, her attention wandered to a solitary pedestrian two or three hundred yards away in the opposite direction. Quietly, Tweede pulled a revolver from his pocket and fired one bullet into the earth at the edge of the pavement. The dog turned and looked at him, then began pawing at the door of the car. With some difficulty, Tweede climbed

back into the driver's seat. The dog tried to slip past him, but he blocked her. He shut the door. Greta whined and pawed at the window, then tried to crawl onto his lap, but the steering wheel was in the way. She licked his ear, turned completely around a couple of times and gave one sharp, peremptory bark. Obediently, Tweede opened his door and stepped out, Greta crowding closely behind. Nose to the ground, she circled the car, found the spot where the bullet had plowed into the earth, and sniffed. Another two laps around the car and she began trotting off down the road toward the northwest. Tweede closed and locked the car and followed.

She set a good pace, indifferent to him and the rest of the world as well. A passing collie failed to divert her. Soon she swung off the street and headed across an open field. Tweede followed as well as he could. It was a good thing he had taken up jogging a year ago. He could never have kept up otherwise.

This part of the metropolitan area was unfamiliar to him. The winding street had confused him. He wasn't sure precisely which direction he was going. But Greta seemed to know. She trotted down a dead-end street and across another open field. The field ended in a

fence and a wooded area—some pines and underbrush. Beyond, glimpsed vaguely through the trees, Tweede saw the roof of a large house. Greta had slipped through the fence, and into the brush. Tweede was about three minutes behind her. The fence proved awkward but passable. He hurried on into the brush.

At first, he was afraid he might have lost her, but a low whine, as though she were crying, led him. He emerged into a small open space among the trees and found her pawing at the ground. Having gotten where she intended to go, she took notice of him, came to him, and shoved her nose into his hand. Then she went back to the patch of weeds, pawed at it some more, and lay down, her muzzle resting on crossed forepaws. He circled the little glade. Her eyes and ears followed him. The earth was slightly depressed on the spot where she lay, but there was little evidence of its having been disturbed. Tweede sighed and wondered what to do. He went to the edge of the brush and looked at the house for a moment, trying to fix its shape on his mind. Then he returned and spoke softly to the dog.

"Come on, Greta, let's go home," he said, snapping his fingers. Obediently, the dog rose and followed him back the way

they had come. He had only to say, "Heel!" and she walked sedately at his side, about a half pace behind him so that her head was even with his thigh. When they arrived back at the car, she climbed in and sat in the passenger seat, looking about like some dignified but lively dowager. He drove her back to the Bettinjohns. She seemed quite pleased to see them.

"Was your test successful?" Mr. Bettinjohn asked.

"I'm afraid so," Tweede replied. Thanking them again for Greta's help, he drove away.

Paul Holroyd was inclined to scoff, but mindful of certain times in the past when Herringbone's hunches or intuitions or whatever they might be called had proved to be more than fancy, he listened and considered a moment before he spoke.

"There are problems," he said. "But there are a few things we can do. A couple of official questions will help. A little presumptive evidence, that's all we need. Of course, you could be all wet. The dog . . ."

"She was pretty sure, Paul. Straight to the spot."

"All right. I'll have the department ask around."

"It's the least you can do," Tweede said.

Holroyd finished the last Danish and wiped his mouth. "The Bettinjohns were quite complimentary about you," he said.

"They ought to be," Tweede replied. "I exercised their dog for a whole afternoon. I'll bet they don't."

"Tut tut, Herringbone. You sound snide and resentful. Something bothering you about the Bettinjohns?"

"I think it's that guard at the gate," Tweede said. "I'll bet he gets paid more in a month than I make."

"Oh, I'm sure he must," Holroyd agreed. "But you wouldn't like the work. Too sedentary. No chance for exercising. Quite dull."

"The money would be nice," Tweede observed wistfully.

"But can it buy happiness or peace of mind?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Bettinjohn . . ." Tweede started to say. Holroyd sniffed.

"Every day about three in the afternoon, Harvey Bettinjohn goes down to the Long Beach wharves and spends an hour watching the ships. He started as a stevedore, bought a boat of his own, and parlayed it into a fleet. Registered out of Puerto Rico. It's a wholly-owned container shipping line now. Twenty ships. But every day—or nearly every day—he goes

down to watch the boats unload.

"Well, I got to get along. Sylvia's mother is visiting from Salt Lake and the old girl wants to go see the Mormon Temple lit up at night. See you. Good coffee for a change, dolly."

The waitress, whose name was Maria, acknowledged the compliment with a smile. She was new on the job and had not yet learned the inverse relationship between Holroyd's compliments and the presence of a tip beside the saucer. Tweede sighed and laid down two quarters. He hated to see new immigrants disillusioned so quickly.

Holroyd called two days later just before noon. "You may be right," he said. "We got a negative reply."

"Is that enough presumptive evidence?" Tweede asked.

Holroyd hedged. "Well, it wouldn't satisfy the D.A., but Judge Rolfe is always willing to let us go out on a limb. Keeps hoping it'll break off. The limb, I mean. With us on it."

"I get the picture," Tweede said.

"So," Holroyd continued heavily, "I'm going to go along with you. I've got a nasty mind like you, I guess."

Late that afternoon, Tweede led Holroyd, a uniform, a curi-

ous dentist, and a pair of shovels to the little wooded patch in Brentwood. While Holroyd and the dentist watched, Tweede and the uniform began to dig in the spot where Greta had been lying. The soil was loose and the grave shallow. Within ten minutes they had uncovered the skeleton of a woman together with the rotting fragments of the dress and the corset she had been wearing. Patches of matted, dissolving hair lay about the skull. Her rings still gleamed against the dirty, yellowed bones of her fingers. The remains of a pair of sensible rubber-heeled shoes encased her mostly decomposed feet.

The dentist, looking green, bent and compared the exposed teeth with a chart he pulled from his pocket. "It matches," he said, after a brief examination. "I recognize some of my own work. This is Mrs. Goodpasture all right."

Holroyd left the uniform on watch beside the disinterred body. The dentist departed back the way they had come while Holroyd and Tweede crossed the back yard and made their way around to the front door. Tweede rang the bell.

"There's a woman who cooks and cleans," he explained.

"She must be out," Holroyd said after a time.

With one of those largely habitual, unpremeditated gestures we all make, Tweede tried the door. To his surprise it was unlocked and opened easily.

They found him in the bath, slumped beneath the red water so that only his eyes showed above.

"Dear Mr. Tweede (the letter said),

"I saw you looking out of the woods at the back of the house this afternoon, so I know you have found out. It was Greta, I suppose. I should have put her away, of course, but it seemed such a cruel thing to do. She loved Mother, but that really had nothing to do with it. I thought if I sold her through a breeder, that would end it.

"I'll never really understand why she loved Mother. Mother certainly didn't love her—only me. It was like being perpetually smothered with a pillow. I got so I couldn't breathe. I suppose I could have stood it, but when she began nagging at me to get married and father some children, it got to be too much. Day and night, she went at it. Finally, she decided we'd have to move back to New Hampshire, since I ob-

viously didn't like any of the girls here. Actually, I do. I may even have fathered a child or two, I don't know. I just don't want you to get the wrong impression. But I don't want to get married. Really, all I want is a little peace and quiet and time to read. Women are so demanding. . . .

"I didn't realize Greta was in the room when I shot her—Mother, I mean. That was Thanksgiving Day a year ago. You asked if Greta were startled by loud noises. I could see you suspected even then. The gun certainly did startle her, but she seemed more alarmed when Mother lay there and wouldn't move. I had to coax her out and shut her in the pantry before I could move Mother to the woods. When I caught Greta the next day pawing at the ground where I'd buried Mother, I knew I'd have to get rid of her. I did like her, you know. She was a gentle dog and good company. I don't understand why she liked Mother more than me.

"I wrote this so there wouldn't be any misunderstanding. I did think I'd gotten away with it. I've handled Mother's money matters for years. I'm really

quite good at that. She has no relatives. Her few acquaintances had heard her say we were moving back east. There was no one to miss her except Greta and I—or is it me? And it's funny, but I do. I must be mad, but I do. Too late, of course.

"Yours,

"Clarence Goodpasture"

"What in hell made him think he could get away with something as crude as that?" Holroyd growled when they had finished reading the letter.

"But he did get away with it," Tweede objected. "You're just piqued because it's one of those things you missed."

"And he'd have gone on getting away with it if I hadn't got you looking for the dog," Holroyd said, his anger evaporating. "I guess that evens things up, so what do you mean, piqued?"

"Nothing, Paul," Tweede said. "I just wonder sometimes how many other cases there are like

this one—cases that we never find out about. Oh, sorry! Now, you're piqued again. Hadn't you better call the squad?"

Holroyd grunted and turned away. Tweede followed. There was nothing more he could do. Now it was up to the LAPD. He walked to the door.

"Yeah, Brentwood," Holroyd was saying into the telephone. "No, we don't need the team. Hey, hold on a minute, Sam." He covered the phone with the palm of his hand. "See you at Dingo's?" he called after Tweede. "I'm buying."

"Sure," Tweede called back. "What happened? You come into money?"

"It's the least I can do," Holroyd said. "You didn't even earn a fee on this. The Bettinjohns said to tell you since the dog came back on her own . . ."

"Thanks, Paul. You've made my day," Tweede said.

"Well, it's a dog's life, you know," Holroyd called.

Tweede sighed and closed the door behind him. Some days, he thought, it certainly was.

FICTION

The Real Gone Sound

by Jeffry Scott

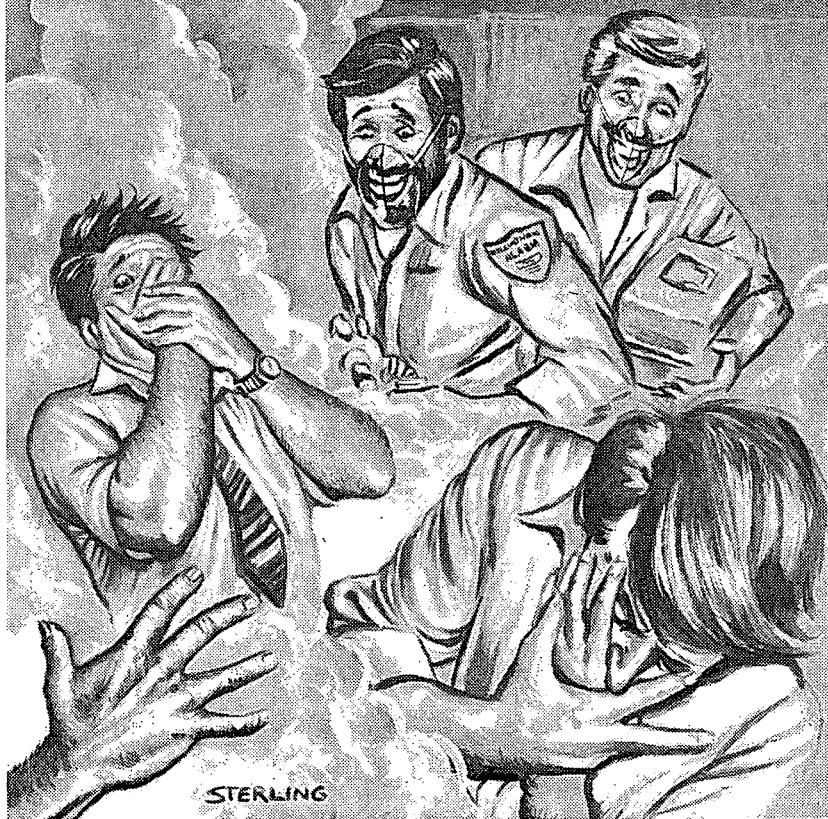


Illustration by Sterling Brown

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Tony Smooth, con man and lateral thinker, has been accused of many things in his time, but marriage guidance counseling has never been among them. Therefore, Glo Brightwell's plea was startling: "Have a word with my hubby, he listens to you, Tone. It's daft, getting soppy over another woman at his age. Why can't he act like a real feller, have a self-fish, empty, meaningless affair?"

It was startling for several reasons. Gloria Christina Brightwell was his ideal of a stand-up, no nonsense North London girl—or rather woman, for her kids were grown up now. Sharp wits, matching tongue, very feminine but more than enough backbone to handle her own problems. And Sid Brightwell happened to be notoriously faithful. The whole thing seemed thoroughly unlikely.

"Has Sid told you something then?" Smooth probed cautiously.

Glo laughed harshly. "Nah, be your age. I can read the signs. You know Sid, dead down to earth. When he's not doing something with his hands—wipe that grin off, you cheeky devil—my Sid's asleep. But these days he drifts away, world of his own, faraway look. Plus he's off his food. Love's young dream." Glo Brightwell added

with dubious logic yet much common sense, "What's more, when I tell him to come clean, own up about this other bird, Sid gets right ratty and says I must be mad. That clinches it, right?"

With his russet hair, long nose, and cheerily predatory gaze, Tony Smooth had a fox-like aura, but at that moment he looked less cunning than evasive. "Look, I start laying the law down and Sid's liable to whack me. Big feller, your old man."

"Rubbish," she scoffed. "It's Our Sharon's eighteenth birthday party on Friday—break her heart if Uncle Tony doesn't come. We've hired St. Asaph's church hall, Our Dean is fixing it up as a disco, he's ever so clever that way. You'll be there, and you can just sort of casually mention the subject to Sid."

Smooth studied Glo Brightwell with affectionate admiration. He loved the idea: casually accusing a hot tempered giant of adultery. Sid was in the demolition business and Smooth suspected that if bulldozers weren't available, Sid could wreck quite substantial buildings with bare hands. He was not a career criminal, but according to persistent rumors, when times were hard or bills pressing, Sid Brightwell had been known to demolish the oc-

casional country bank for the purpose of *al fresco* cash withdrawals at three in the morning.

Tony Smooth duly arrived at Sharon Brightwell's coming-of-age celebration, causing a stir by presenting her with a magnum of champagne for each year that she'd been alive. After half an hour he felt as if he were suffering the hangover caused by quaffing the lot on his own. St. Asaph's church hall was large but low-ceilinged, and from surprisingly modestly sized gear, Sharon's gifted brother Dean was projecting savage volumes of noise, electronic anthems battering older guests like a typhoon, bass notes making Smooth's very chest cavity vibrate.

A hand not much smaller than a shovel closed on his upper arm. Sid Brightwell, clad in a new suit and the Brightwell tie worn only for funerals and great clan occasions, bellowed confidently, "Step outside, mate."

The night was chill and drizzly but blessedly quieter. "Remember the old Duke and Dustman? We'll pop-in there, have a sharpener where we can hear ourselves think," Sid explained.

They had the back bar of the pub—the tiny room unsuspected by first-time patrons—to themselves. Sid yanked the tie

down, half closed his eyes in relaxation, and raised his tumbler of scotch. " 'Stonishing good health, Tone. How's tricks . . . flogged the Tower of London lately, got some poor Yank to take a long lease on Buckingham Palace? "

Tony Smooth smiled politely. It was an opening of sorts. *Talking about tricks, what dirty ones are you playing on Glo, old son?* Noting, not for the first time, that Sid Brightwell had arms more impressive than most people's legs, he kept quiet.

Conversation languished, Sid was distracted, he had the fidgets, he sighed rather often. Unable to stand it, Smooth snapped, "All right, we go back a long way. Who is she, and what are you going to do about Glo and the kids, then?"

Sid blinked and nearly spilt his drink. Then he suggested, without resentment, "Glo's been winding you up. Silly moo, as if I'd go looking when I got the pick o' the litter at home. . . . But I can't tell her what's the matter. Business, see, and what she don't know can't hurt her."

He glanced around to ensure that they remained on their own, leaned forward, lowered his voice.

"Funny part is, Glo's right in a way. I am in love. Right frustrating it is. Only not with a her . . . with an *It*."

Inevitable misunderstanding sorted out ("No, I am not bloody saying I'm gay!" Sid growled), Smooth was fascinated. The prospect of plunder just waiting there to assume that identity would do it every time.

"An It," Sid Brightwell elaborated, "because I'm talking about a house. Looks a bit of a dump from the street, Victorian house down on its luck, squeezed between a multi-story car park and a carpet warehouse that closed down last year. The house is on three floors, converted into offices on the cheap, the windows are dirty but you can make out filing cabinets and such. Normally, you wouldn't look at it twice but that's the idea."

Going off on a tangent, he asked, "Ever hear of Mangy Morrie Menzies?"

Tony Smooth consulted the Roladex in his head. "South London face, went bald in patches when he was a kid, never got over it. Runs a few girls, porn shop or two."

"That's the one," Sid confirmed, "only Mangy Morrie's come on a bundle in the last few years, got a lot going for him besides hookers and dirty books—now it's massage parlors and loan sharking, and a sweet little forged sports tickets racket, his fingers are in no

end of pies. Mostly cash what the taxman never hears about, meaning a serious load of money sloshing about."

"My favorite," Smooth chorled.

"Don't get your hopes up, Tone. It's a very tasty tickle, no error. That's what has been driving me potty for weeks, I can't hardly sleep of a night for fretting. *There's no way of getting at it.* Not short of war." And Sid Brightwell sighed deeply before going on.

"Back in March I had the sub-contract for shifting muck, supermarket site South London way. So I'm taking a short-cut past Bingly Green, this side of Ealing—Green they call it, but it's just a scrubby little triangle of grass—when the wagon breaks down. Naturally it takes Our Gavin hours to get his backside in gear and fetch the tow truck, so I'm sitting there like a lemon, being a great help in the rush hour.

"Now I'm not watching this house, it happens to be slap in front of me through the cab. First off, I see Mangy Morrie Menzies come out. He doesn't see me and I don't give him a shout because Mangy Morrie is dross, not our class of villain.

"Half an hour later, all hell breaks loose. I tell you, if that noise had colors, it'd have been . . ." Sid groped for words.

"... bright purple with yellow stripes. Burglar alarm, see. Folk in the street were sort of cowering and running for cover; it nearly blew me out of the cab. Horrible flaming din. Only one alarm has decibels like that—a Bellingham."

He waited expectantly until Smooth, feeling dense at missing the punchline, said irritably, "I'm a con man, Sid, not a flaming burglar."

"A Bellingham's the Rolls Royce of alarm systems and costs about as much, but then you're buying the best. It's a belt-and-braces job, two defenses in one: loudest noise in the business, to put your intruder off his stroke, encourage him to have it away on his toes, and a direct-line silent alarm to the nearest police station, so with any luck he runs straight out into the arms of the Filth," Sid lectured patiently.

"But that didn't happen. No coppers showed up, though Bingly Green nick is under half a mile off. I'll tell you who did turn up, leading the posse—Mark Hagley. Markie's been Mangy Morrie's minder and muscle for years, and he had a couple more hounds with him, they went running in to those offices and the alarm stopped, and then a charwoman came out in tears, with Markie rucking her at the top of his voice.

Obviously she'd set the alarm off by accident. Very sophisticated system, your Bellingham, easy to trip."

Taking advantage of Sid's pause for breath, Tony Smooth waxed sarcastic. "Fascinating. You'll be showing me your holiday snaps next."

Sid Brightwell smirked at him. "You haven't caught on. Here we've got a rundown house turned into grotty offices. So why put a Bellingham alarm in? Prolly cost as much as the house. What's more, it *doesn't* have the silent alarm to the cops. Think about it."

While Smooth obeyed, Sid produced a ballpen and drew a triangle on the back of a beer mat. "This is Bingly Green, High Street forms one side here, the house is halfway along, where I put the dot." The pen point skimmed across the triangle to make another dot. "Here's a block of flats where Mark Hagley and the other guards are based. That alarm goes off, they hear it—you'd hear it at Brighton, with the wind in the right direction—and are on deck in a minute or so."

"Clear as mud," Tony Smooth observed. Actually he was way ahead but wanted to see how well Sid had done his homework.

"Screw your loaf, Tone, the baker's about! Get the old nod-

dle working. Mark Hagley works for Mangy Morrie Menzies. Mangy Morrie has so much money flowing in he needs a forklift truck to shift it. Hagley and up to half a dozen other heavies are on duty round the clock, twice a month for a period of maybe three or four days, watching the Bingly Green house. Which is fitted with a state of the art burglar alarm.

"I been watching what goes on, discreetly like. That's why I'm out till all hours and Glo thinks I'm birding on the sly. Beginning and end of the month, those offices get lots of visitors. I've trailed a few, one was manageress of a massage parlor by Euston Station, there were a couple of Morrie's porn shop front men. For days they keep coming, then one morning Mangy Morrie goes in and comes out with a suitcase big enough to hide your ma-in-law's corpse, you were thinking of dumping her at Left Luggage and losing the ticket."

He paused long enough to open the sliding hatch, summon the publican and obtain further triple measures of scotch. "This is the good part, Tone, took me ages to nail down, following no more than half a mile at a go, then *starting* to tail 'em again from where I left off.

"It's a right convoy—Mark

Hagley in one motor, Mangy Morrie and the suitcase in the middle car, more minders in car three at the back. They go to a private airfield in Hertfordshire, there's a Lear jet warmed up and waiting, Mangy Morrie and party hop aboard and it's off into the wild blue yonder. Dead obvious: the Bingly Green house is the way-station for Morrie's takings, he collects it there before salting the loot away in a foreign bank."

Playing the devil's advocate, Smooth objected, "If he leaves a small fortune in that place twice a month, why not have his minders nursing it on the premises instead of being pugged up t'other side of the Green?" Answering his own challenge, he cut in on Sid.

"Because if he does that, sooner or later the beat coppers will twig that there are lights on there all hours of the night, and start wondering why. The whole object of this is to be low-profile, *not* attract attention."

"Right," Sid confirmed. "Morrie's no fool. If he kept the money where he lives, the law might raid him some time, them or the tax people. Not to mention a rival firm dropping in with shooters and cleaning him out. No, the Bingly Green house works like a charm. There's even a couple of legit offices on the ground floor, stamp dealer

and a feller selling racing tips by post. Mangy Morrie's runners can go in and out, delivering cash, and it's just routine."

Pathos throbbed in Sid Brightwell's voice. "That suitcase," he claimed with a boastful-fisherman gesture of measurement, "is *that* big, and deep in proportion, Tone. Got to be a quarter of a million. Well, hundred thousand, easy."

"Tasty," Tony Smooth conceded. "So what's keeping you?"

"Hah! The Bellingham is what. I got no illusions about meself, I'm a good enough thief but no technician. Bash the door down, better yet the wall as well, steam in and grab what I can. You don't do that with a Bellingham. Pressure pads, heat sensors, invisible beams, and God knows what; look at that perishin' setup the wrong way and it'll trip and make a noise like the D-Day landings and a Rolling Stones concert rolled into one. Then Mark Hagley and three' four lads o' the village jump in and start tap dancing on your head." Sid flexed mighty biceps and added, "I can handle meself but Superman I ain't. Also, that Mark Hagley never could take a joke, he's nasty and he works tooled up, uses a sawn-off. Not fit company for a married man with kids."

"Amen," said Smooth. "You

get killed, Glo will never speak to you again. Or me, which is what counts."

Draining his scotch as if tasting medicine, Sid mourned, "If I was a real tearaway with a team behind me, I could try an ambush on the way to the plane. But I'm not, and even if I was, chances are it'd take too long with that many bodyguards, the coppers would jump the lot of us and spoil the fun. No, I need to get into that house, and I can't get past the Bellingham. Don't tell me to hire a specialist, neither. Prisons are full of experts what reckoned they could nobble a Bellingham—and this time you wouldn't end up in prison, you'd be helping to form a new motorway bridge, with Mangy Morrie pouring the concrete."

He stood up. "Come on, better get back to the party."

Tony Smooth murmured, "I bet there's another way." Lateral thinking, he urged himself. Super alarm or no, he had great faith in human nature—that polite label for eternal stupidity.

Incredibly, Sharon Brightwell's party was noisier than ever when they returned. Most adults had followed Smooth and her father's example, adjourning to celebrate her birthday elsewhere, and a lot more young faces were present.

Tony Smooth attracted the frenetically dancing girl's attention and waved farewell to his honorary niece. He was fairly sure that lingering would cause his head to split like a halved coconut. Making for the door, he spotted a modest black and brown cube taped to a rafter and emitting a positive torrent of din—a Wharfedale speaker placed by Our Dean, Sharon's disco-creating brother.

Smooth contemplated the object. It was tiny compared to now antique hi-fi gear of the sixties: then speakers had been suitcase sized, substantial items of furniture in their own right, but Our Dean's were no bigger than—

His skin tingled, his mouth dried under the impact of inspiration.

Cupping his hands to Sid Brightwell's ear, he bellowed, "Remember that bet, about fixing a Bellingham alarm? Well, you're on!"

Tony Smooth might have a foxlike aura, but Lindy Cazenove was downright foxy—built like a model, a face to die for. And more than decorative; Lindy ran her own business supplying jingles, sound effects, and technical advice across Britain's commercial radio network.

"I can do it," she agreed. "You

make the thing go off and I'll record it with nobody the wiser. Then I can stroke and tweak the tape, eliminate the wild sound, street noise in the background, and so forth, it will come on exactly like the original. Question is, why should I go to all the trouble, Tone?"

"Because you've lusted after me for years," Smooth claimed, poker-faced. "And if this caper works, I shan't forget my friends." He rubbed thumb against forefinger in the timeless and international language of money. Ms. Cazenove's perfect white teeth bared in an appreciative smile.

Next morning, unrecognizably muffled in layers of sweaters, watch cap pulled down over her brows, Lindy Cazenove was trudging past Gosforth Gemini Processes, an anonymous factory in Outer London. A bulky, heavy shoulder bag made her droop to one side. The GGP factory was surrounded by a well-maintained chain link fence topped by three strands of barbed wire. Some of the Processes of the firm's title involve precious metals, the place is prissily secure.

At seven forty-eight A.M., just before GGP's day shift clocked on, Tony Smooth pulled off the slow lane of the M4 motorway to pause on the hard shoulder. This placed him above the GGP

compound where the overpass shadowed it. Rolling down the van's window, he took careful aim with the .22 target rifle, and fired once before feeding back into the westbound traffic.

The bullet smashed a window in the High Value Block of the factory, burying itself harmlessly in the far wall, fifteen feet up. Smooth wasn't in the business of hurting people anywhere except pride and wallet.

The High Value Block's windows were less simple than they looked. As part of the Bellingham system, the panes had fine wires sandwiched in the glass. When the glass broke, the alarm went off.

Down at street level, Lindy Cazenove halted, rummaging in her bag, perhaps for a tissue or a pack of cigarettes. The noise was impressive, an alien and inhuman whooping and peeling, with undertones of a 747 jet's engines being tested. She didn't stand out by pausing and gaping for the best part of one minute because most of the passers-by had been transfixed by the din.

Fortunately Ms. Cazenove's working space was soundproof. Two days later, after her staff had gone home, she played the tape for Tony Smooth. It was painfully accurate, punishingly loud. "That's a loop," she explained, passing him the unla-

beled cassette. "It'll play 'til doomsday, if you happen to be a sadist."

Smooth, Sid Brightwell, and his son, Our Dean, sat in a row on the bench front seat of one of Sid's old panel vans. They weren't going anywhere. The van was on the fourth level of the multi-story park at Bingly Green. The facility being opensided, they had a great view of the Victorian house that was Mangy Maurice Menzies' private bank. Its side wall was no more than twelve feet away across the gap between multi-story and house.

Tony Smooth spoke chattily. "People aren't very observant and even those that are fall down on counting. For instance, the top floor window over there has a Bellingham alarm box either side of it—dark grey sheet steel, starting to rust a bit. Now if *another* pair of alarm boxes was to pop up each side of the next floor window, right opposite us there, I very much doubt whether anybody would notice."

Our-Dean, a polite yet taciturn youth, grunted agreement. "Anything above eye level, Uncle Tone, it's invisible."

"Well said," beamed Smooth. "Now then, son: could you pack enough of your disco gear into

the back of this van to play a tape loud enough to wake the dead over there?"

"Need power," Our Dean commented. His head moved from side to side, then he jabbed a finger at the side window. "I could run a lead off the cable for the lights, it runs along the floor, see it clipped to the crash barrier?"

"Don't blind me with science," Tony Smooth reproved him. "What I'm saying, you could roll in here one night, this place doesn't get much custom once the stores have closed, and be able to play a tape without anyone knowing you were at it, right?"

"Maybe," Our Dean assented. "But they would know, from the sounds."

Smooth chuckled to himself. "Ah, but the sounds will be coming from Mangy Morrie's place. You rig up two powerful speakers, old son, to look like Bellingham alarm boxes, and you put 'em on the house over there. T'other night at the party, I noticed the leads from your disco speakers were quite thin, and being dark colored, they wouldn't show up at night..."

Sid Brightwell, stirring restively, complained, "And Mark Hagley and the rest of the miners will let us do it, eh?"

"They won't know," Tony Smooth replied. "You've got the

famous head for heights, Sid. And like I said, this park is dead quiet, after say eight at night. No watchman, park at your own risk. One old feller at the exit downstairs, taking money.

"Dean prepares the speakers. The two of you come in about nine P.M., in the van, park here. I take my car out, hit the old chap with a fifty quid note for a couple of quidsworth of parking, keep him occupied just in case. Dean nips out with a 'This Level Closed' sign to keep people away, anyone comes in while you're working, they drive straight up to the next floor.

"Sid, you sling a ladder across to the windowsill over there. The speakers are light, you prepare the backs with mastic and some sticky gunge, you're the handyman, so they can just be slapped into place like limpet mines. The leads feed back here to Dean's transmitting gear in the back of the van. Should take ten minutes and that's being generous."

He punched Sid Brightwell's shoulder, discreetly. "The beauty of this is you won't be breaking in, just adding something. So the alarm's not a problem."

Sid repeated flatly, "Generous. Dean puts a trestle and a placard down, keeps watch. You chat up the grey panther down-

stairs. I just risk life and flaming limb, forty feet up in the dark, mucking about with loud-speakers and leads and such-like."

"From each according to his ability," Tony Smooth countered smugly.

Mr. Brightwell smiled bleakly. "Tone, don't think me a spoilsport nor nothing, but if I got it straight, you want to give Mangy Morrie and Mark Hagley *another* Bellingham alarm. They got one already. That's my problem."

"Trust me," said Smooth. "Now listen hard, both ears, and I'll tell you how it works..."

Lena Brown, manageress of the Para-Paradise massage parlor (a Mangy Maurice Menzies enterprise) was shrewd, dour, humorless, and deeply cautious by nature and experience. That was why she was in charge, though being his mother-in-law was another factor.

Like other minions, she took money to the Bingly Green house twice a month. Unlike them, she constantly varied the route and means of transportation—taxis, buses, an Underground train. More often than not Mrs. Brown nearly filled a large, sad plastic carrier bag of the kind given away at laundrettes, then stuffed some re-

voltingly dirty clothes atop perhaps ninety thousand pounds in cash. Nobody took the slightest notice of it or her, of course.

One morning she emerged from the Para-Paradise and a strange man, more interested in catching a bus than watching his steps, trod on her foot. He apologized effusively and swung aboard the bus in mid-sentence. She got a fleeting impression of russet hair, a long nose.

Body contact had been trivial, momentary. But being Mrs. Brown she went straight back indoors, locked her office door, dumped the dirty clothing out of the bag, and extracted six bulky packages encased in taped-down newspaper. Being Mrs. Brown, she slit each package with a razorblade, until satisfied that they still contained currency.

Only then did she resume her journey to Bingly Green. Cautious as she was, Mrs. Brown did not think to check the camouflage washing as she replaced it. So she failed to notice an extra dirty sock among half a dozen pairs of the things.

Night in the multi-story. The interior of the panel van was stifling, which might have accounted for Our Dean sweating so hard. He whispered, "It's like every-

thing's standing out a mile, Uncle Tone."

Smooth smiled understandingly. He was wearing part of a uniform, neatly creased black trousers, slate-grey shirt with epaulettes. He said, "A bloke just walked to within touching distance of this motor and took five minutes to find his keys. And we might as well have been on the moon for all he knew, son. All folks care about is whether their car is still there. That and getting the hell home."

Sid Brightwell, also in uniform—the grey beret suited him—added a hushed, "We're in fine shape, Dean-boy."

Our Dean blushed and clamped the headset back against his ears, frowning in concentration as a light flashed on his improvised console. The phone line to Mangy Maurice's bank ran past the multi-story and Our Dean was tapping it. "That was Mark Hagley calling his girlfriend in Manchester. Stingy sod comes across the Green and phones from there to save his own bill at the flat, I reckon."

Sid Brightwell opened his mouth, but Tony Smooth stuck in, "Doesn't matter, Hagley being on the premises. Him and the team have to be, to let us in later."

At nine forty-five P.M. the

alarm went off. Traffic was light at the time, but a motorcyclist swerved in shock and nearly caused an accident when the truck following braked and skidded, clipping a KEEP LEFT bollard. After three interminable minutes, Smooth nodded decisively and Our Dean stopped playing the tape.

They could hear a click as Sid Brightwell swallowed hard. "Tone, it's louder at night. The law's going to hear, even without a direct alarm to the nick. Some beat bobby's bound to come nosing."

"Counting on it, old son," Tony Smooth responded placidly. "We want Mangy Maurice's lot shaken up. *Distrain*, as the French put it. Mangy Maurice will hate the law poking around his honey pot. The objective of the exercise, like we used to say in the army, is to have him praying for the alarm to stop."

He leaned back and appeared to doze. At ten twenty-six P.M., not opening his eyes, he said, "Dean, tickle 'em up over there."

Mark Hagley, craggy, small-eyed, vile tempered, crashed his fist against the wall. "Second time tonight! Bloody thing's acting up, for sure. Gerry, you sure all the windows and doors are kosher, nobody been messing with them?"

The little thug with the broken nose snuffled, "Do me favors, you was breaving down me neck when I checked just now."

"Shut yer trap and get back on the front door with Nodger," Mark Hagley commanded. He let himself into the office used by Maurice Menzies, locked it behind him, and opened an unobtrusive flap beside the gas fire. Disclosing a panel bearing the Bellingham logo flanked by a pair of lights. The green glowed steadily, the red was out. According to the panel, the alarm had never sounded.

Hagley cursed savagely, flipped the cover home, stormed back to street level and led his team outside. A small delegation awaited. "Some of us got to work in the morning, mister . . . Disgraceful, it's noise pollution . . . One more outbreak and we call the police."

Mark Hagley, controlling himself, grunted, "Won't happen again." That was when the alarm went off for the third time.

Our Dean listened to Mark Hagley reporting to Mangy Maurice Menzies, seven miles away across London. ". . . Four times now, boss. The law's been round, made me show I.D. and I told them to give you a bell, vouch for me. I had to, they

wanted to take me in on suspicion, you're the official keyholder on their list . . ."

Eventually Dean slipped the headset down and announced, "Mangy Maurice is on his way."

Tony Smooth, tamping the neat hairline mustache into position, said, "Listen out real hard, Dean. The next call will be Mangy Morrie getting on to Bellingham's." He laughed explosively, a fox's yap. "Might as well repeat the dose, just a little ten-second burst to keep 'em hopping over there." And in the house next door, the alarm went off. . . .

Mangy Maurice Menzies snapped, "I've had enough of this. You must be doing something wrong."

Mark Hagley stopped chewing his lower lip to mutter, "I'm just the one what's been taking flak and getting cosy with coppers all night. I tell you it keeps going off, all we do is come in and look around and there's no reason for it. Oh, Jesus . . ."

The racket, though coming from boxes on the outer wall, filled the house. Mangy Maurice withstood it for half a minute before going to the fireside panel and using his special control key—the one Hagley had yearned to use, long before—killing the system. Menzies snatched up the phone, fumbled

his diary from an inner pocket, located a number, and dialed it with enraged force.

Over in the multi-story, Our Dean gasped, "He just got on to Bellingham's!" and Sid Brightwell stood up, banging his beret on the van's roof.

Tony Smooth restrained him. "More haste, less speed. Take Bellingham's emergency crew a good half hour to get here, if they step on it. Which they won't, not this long past midnight. They'll be kipped down at the depot, earning double pay in their sleep. Ever know a twenty-four-hour service man eager to get busy in the middle of the night?"

Buttoning his Bellingham tunic, he sat with head bowed, looking at his watch. "All right, we're off, Sid. Dean, give us five minutes, then unhook all your leads to the speakers and that, get off home. Don't go being a hero, try to rig the ladder and get the speakers back. Just go home, we'll see you later."

I hope, he amended silently.

Smooth and Sid Brightwell slipped out of the multi-story by the stairs and a pedestrian rear exit, walked half a mile, and collected the grey unmarked station wagon with its tall whip aerial and pyramid of tool boxes in the back.

"Took your blasted time," said Mangy Maurice Menzies. Hov-

ering with the front door open a crack, he'd trundled to the curb as soon as the station wagon arrived. The street lighting drained the newcomers' flesh of color and humanity. One was tall, bespectacled, and bearded, the other smaller, with a thirties filmstar mustache, white hair, and marvelously dapper uniform.

Menzies snatched the laminated I.D. cards, matched them against the pair. Dancing with impatience, he yammered, "Get on with it, then!"

The dapper mechanic didn't move. He spoke slowly, Essex accent irritating Mangy Maurice as much as the words. "Bad back, me. Disc trouble. And the truss, I never have come to terms with the truss. You got a mate in there, help a chap with the heavy lifting? My mate's got his hands full, see."

This was patently true, for the bearded man in uniform had lifted the tailgate and was trudging up the front steps with a metal casket under each arm. Mangy Maurice gestured impatiently and Mark Hagley came out, shouldering past Mustache to bear his toolbox indoors.

The front door shut behind them all.

Mustache turned briskly businesslike. "Right, gents, think I know your trouble. It's the freon gas in the back up sys-

tem, like as not. Is this everybody here? I need you all in the same room."

The bearded mechanic had opened a toolbox and was donning breathing gear, passing another mask to his colleague.

"Hang on," Mangy Maurice Menzies ordered, "never mind all of us in one room; Bellingham men or no, I'm going to stick with you. What's this about gas?"

Whereupon the bearded man demonstrated, filling the hallway with a boiling, choking, instantly expanding cloud of stinging vapor.

Mark Hagley, quickest-thinking of the home team, lashed out with a kick and punched hard in the same instant. Ready for such lack of manners, Tony Smooth caught the foot and tipped Hagley on his back. He couldn't tamper with the punch, which was unfortunate, though only for Mangy Maurice and his hireling. Mangy Maurice was winded and Hagley broke three fingers on his ornate belt buckle.

There were four subdued men to further subdue and then tie up. It took far longer than the actual ambush and attack—Sid Brightwell was mustard at the subduing part, but unhandy with knots.

Upstairs, he and Smooth removed their gas masks. Sid's

face, false beard and all, fell when they opened the third office's door to be confronted by windowless walls, naked floorboards and a massive if elderly safe as sole furniture.

"I can crack it, Tone, but it'll take ages."

Tony Smooth rubbed his hands. "The alarm went off," he reminded his partner. "Mangy Maurice came here on the hurry-up, as expected. What do you do when an alarm goes off, even if it's probably a false alarm? Why, you check your valuables. Run down and get Maurice's key ring, there's a good chap."

Sid spoke huskily. "Tone, you're a little marvel."

His good opinion altered, radically and unprintably, when they found the right key and opened the safe . . . which was empty.

"Well," Tony Smooth admitted philosophically, "it crossed my mind this might happen. Mangy Maurice has a nasty double-dealing streak, what you might term a devious mind. And okay, the house is low-profile but too many people knew about his stash—Mark Hagley, the rest of the minders, the characters bringing the takings here. Asking for trouble in the long run."

They were sitting on the floor beside that mockingly unrewarding safe, drinking a steal-by-finding bottle of Mangy

Morrie's scotch. Sid Brightwell had wanted to get out; Smooth pointed out that there was no real hurry for the moment.

Sid, tipping the bottle while scratching the margin of his beard—it was itching like the newly grown real thing—choked suddenly and glared at the con man. "You're winding me up, Tone. You got something up your bloody sleeve besides arm, I can tell."

Tony Smooth beamed angelically. He said dreamily, "There's a gadget for people who lose stuff. Like a tiny little transmitter. And you clap your hands or you whistle . . . presto, your specs or car keys or whatever, starts answering back. Handy idea."

Hooking a toolchest closer, he opened it and brought out an oblong object rather larger than a shoebox. Constructed of heat-welded plastic card, it seemed homemade. "Lindy Cazenove built this. Bit more powerful and sophisticated than clapping your hands. Homes in on a microchip stuffed down in the toe of a grotty old sock."

Rising, Smooth thumbed the toggle on his box. "It could still come unstuck, mind. Lena Brown from the massage parlor rolls up here with a red bag at the start of the month, comes out with a blue one, near enough empty. Two weeks on, she brings

a blue bag, comes out with the red. I'm banking on money and old clothes getting tucked away all together. If she doesn't have two sets of camouflage on the go, switches the dirty stuff from bag to bag, then you and me have sent a great deal of time, trouble, and nervous energy down the Swannee, Sid."

In the room with the safe, the box remained mute. "It's not working," Sid fretted, but loyal to Lindy Cazenove, Smooth kept trying. He started a methodical search—and out in the passage the box began chirping. Faintly, evoking sleepy nestlings, until he entered Mangy Maurice's office, where the chirps gained volume, rising to a real Dawn Chorus in one corner.

"Funny place to put a rug," Sid Brightwell muttered, rolling the thing back. "Place you'd expect to find a trapdoor, though. Pass me that pinchbar, Tone, let's get this open."

The suitcase was promisingly bulky. Lifting it out, breaking the locks, and raising its lid, they found most of its space filled by rubber-banded bricks of twenty and fifty pound notes. An L-shaped section was vacant. "Ready for the last takings to come in tomorrow, then it'd all have been off to Geneva or Vaduz," Tony Smooth predicted.

Lena Brown's washing bag lay atop the money. Unrolling it, he shook out a tangle of socks and grubby underclothes, making the seeker-box chirrup frantically.

Kneeling at the suitcase, Sid Brightwell was reverent. "There's even more than we thought..."

"Don't count it here," Smooth advised dryly. Gag-muffled shouts and the noises of active men struggling to escape underlined his message. "So far, we haven't been recognized, might as well keep it that way on health grounds; ours, for instance. They'd love us to stick around and wait for them, but the best of friends must part."

When they got back, Glo Brightwell greeted him with a rib-cracking hug. "Bless you, Tone! It's not the money so much as the peace of mind." She cast a fondly mocking look at

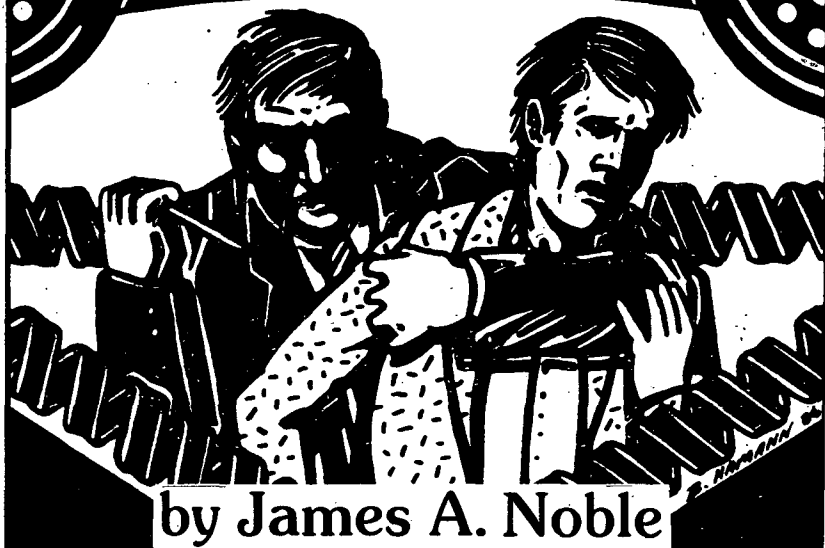
her husband. "Silly old fool, why didn't you come straight out and say you was At. It again? Though I might have known it wasn't women on your mind—always did love your work, you."

Technologically gifted Lindy Cazenove's eyes sparkled to match what lay on her palm—a diamond bracelet. Tony Smooth had dropped in at her flat with the command, "Shut your eyes, open your hands, see what the fairies have brung."

"They're *real*," she gasped. "Just for that tape, and the gadget? Tony, what was that all about?"

Smooth, whose arm had found its way round her waist, wasn't crass enough to retort that in his circle questions were for evading, not answering. He smiled wickedly. "About a hundred and fifty thousand quid, if you mean my corner, luv."

The Invisible Clue



by James A. Noble

“I stopped by to see our friend Captain Evert today,” said Thatch, settling back in his chair.

“We really should invite him over sometime,” said Winnie. “How is he?”

“He’s fine,” replied Thatch, “but he and his police department are under a great deal of pressure.”

“How so?”

“His department is in charge of the investigation into the murder of State Congressman Randolph Petty. It appears they’ve reached an impasse.”

Winnie picked up her knitting. “Didn’t I read something about Congressman Petty in the newspapers? Prior to the murder, I mean.”

“Indeed you did. A week before he was murdered, he met

with the news media and informed them he was planning to present a report detailing racketeering and cronyism at the next legislative session. Rumor was, he intended to expose one of his fellow state congressmen as the ringleader behind the corruption. Unfortunately, that report was stolen on the day he was murdered."

"That would seem to narrow the number of suspects considerably," said Winnie.

Thatch nodded. "To three, as a matter of fact. Three state congressmen who have been unable to supply the police with alibis for the day of the murder."

"Did Captain Evert give you any more details of the case, dear?" asked Winnie, pausing in her knitting and looking over the top of her glasses at her husband.

Thatch sighed. "Yes, he did. I gather you want me to tell you the whole story."

Winnie just smiled brightly.

"I should have known you were going to get involved," said Thatch. "Very well."

"On the night prior to the murder, Saturday that is, Congressman Petty sent his wife Susan and the housekeeper away with instructions not to return until Monday."

"According to Susan Petty, whenever he had important work to do at home, he would

shut himself in his study, take the telephone off the hook, disable the doorbell, and send her and the housekeeper away. He would even put a 'Do Not Disturb' sign on the front door. She said that her husband was easily distracted by nearly everything and often performed this little ritual whenever he was under a time constraint to get something done."

"Did Susan Petty know what her husband was working on that Sunday?"

"Yes," replied Thatch. "Before she left, he told her he was going to put the finishing touches on the corruption report."

"Anyway, Susan returned to the house late Sunday afternoon to check up on him."

Winnie looked puzzled. "I thought you said Randolph Petty told her not to return until Monday."

"He did," said Thatch. "But his wife generally ignored those instructions and would stop by to see if he was all right. According to Susan, he was often irritated by her interruption, but she wasn't about to let that dissuade her."

"Forgive my interruption. Continue your story, dear," said Winnie, returning to her knitting.

"As Susan got out of her car, she noticed that one of the windows in Randolph's study was

opened a crack. Since it is winter and was quite cold, she was understandably concerned.

"She rushed into the house and found Randolph lying on the floor next to his desk, a letter opener sticking in his chest. Immediately, she picked up the receiver from the top of the desk where Randolph had left it and called for an ambulance and the police.

"Congressman Randolph Petty was pronounced dead at the scene. The office had been ransacked and the corruption report and notes were gone."

Thatch paused, obviously having concluded the story. Moments of silence passed.

"The letter opener came from the study?" asked Winnie finally.

"Yes, a gift from his constituents many years ago."

"Any fingerprints?"

"No, everything had been wiped clean, I'm afraid."

"Did the congressman lock himself in his study?"

Thatch shook his head. "Susan said he almost never locked any of the doors or windows around the house."

"So the murderer could have walked right in." Winnie thought for a moment. "Was the coroner able to fix the time of death?"

"Not exactly. He is quite certain that death came very quickly to Randolph Petty, since

the blade of the letter opener pierced his heart. The trouble is, our murderer was very clever. By opening the window a crack, he caused the study to grow quite chilly. Since the precise time the window was opened is unknown, it was difficult for the coroner to determine how long the body had been exposed to the cold air. His best guess is sometime early Sunday afternoon, but it might have been that morning."

"What do the three suspect congressmen have to say about visiting Randolph Petty that day?"

"They all deny it," said Thatch. "Anthony Rever from the third district and Barker Williams from the fifth both stated they were home alone all day. Charles Manfeld from the seventh district claims he spent the day at his office downtown chasing paper. None of the three can prove where he was that day, however.

"Captain Evert has moved very cautiously in his investigation. Thus far, he has questioned all the state congressmen in a cursory manner without singling out Manfeld, Williams, or Rever. He doesn't want to give the media the impression that any of the three congressmen are involved. It could be disastrous to their political careers even if they are proved innocent."

Winnie paused in her knit-

ting to stare thoughtfully at the ceiling. "So Manfeld, Williams, and Rever are unaware that they are Captain Evert's prime suspects."

"Correct. The captain has to be quite certain about his facts, and that's made his investigation difficult."

"I would think the police would have a relatively easy time picking out the murderer," mused Winnie.

"Why do you say that?"

"Why, because of the snow-fall we had before dawn that Sunday. An inch or two, I believe. It covered the roads and certainly the Petty driveway. All the police had to do was take photographs of the tire prints in the driveway and match them up to each of the cars of the three suspects. Then they would know exactly who visited Randolph Petty that day."

"Nice try," said Thatch, laughing. "Unfortunately, our state highway department cleared the streets, while Randolph called a professional company to have his sidewalks and drive cleared."

Winnie looked up from her knitting. "He did? When?"

"Sometime in the early afternoon. Probably before he was murdered."

"Poppycock," said Winnie firmly. "What was the name of the company that cleared the snow?"

"Ambrose Brothers."

Winnie got up to fetch the phone book. "I must talk to that man who cleared the sidewalks and driveway immediately."

"Won't do any good," said Thatch. "The man has already been questioned by the police. He stated that no one arrived or left the house during the time he was working . . . except for Mrs. Petty when she came home as he was leaving."

"Go put your tie and jacket on," said Winnie as she searched through the phone book. "We're going to have guests."

Thatcher struggled out of his chair. "We are? Who?"

"Congressmen Anthony Rever, Barker Williams, and Charles Manfeld."

"The three suspects? What makes you think they'll come here?"

"Because you're going to call and invite them."

"I hardly think my invitation will entice them here."

"It will when you tell them I know who the murderer of Congressman Petty is."

Thatch was about to object, but Winnie was already on the phone talking to Ambrose Brothers.

Charles Manfeld was the first to arrive that afternoon. Barker Williams and Anthony Rever soon followed. They sat quietly in

the living room until Winnie was ready to begin.

"First, I'd like to thank you for coming," started Winnie.

"I'm only here because I expect you to clear my good name," interrupted Manfeld. "The Honorable Randolph Petty was my close friend and associate. I am shocked by his untimely death."

Winnie gave him an unfriendly gaze. "Your gift for political oratory will do you no good here, Mr. Manfeld."

Manfeld settled back in his chair.

"I'd like to begin by introducing you to Mr. Amos Batton." Winnie nodded toward Thatch, who opened the door. A very thin man in coveralls and flannel shirt stepped cautiously into the room.

"Over here, Mr. Batton," directed Winnie.

Amos ambled over to where she was standing.

"You're employed by Ambrose Brothers?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And you were sent to clear the driveway and sidewalks of Congressman Randolph Petty's home on the Sunday he was murdered?"

"Yes, ma'am. Just like I told the police."

"And who phoned your company requesting your service?"

Batton shrugged. "Don't know. Like my boss told the

police, some man called around one that afternoon and told us to get over to the Petty place and clear the walks and drive right away. Told us to bill him. We just naturally assumed it was Mr. Petty."

"When did you arrive?"

"Not until four. With the snowfall we got early that morning, we were pretty busy. 'Course, the boss told me to get there as soon as I could, being it was a new customer and a congressman and all."

"Did you happen to notice a partially open window at the front of the house?"

"Sure did. Spotted it right off. You see, I always start up by the house and work my way down the drive to the street, where I park the truck." Batton chuckled. "Seemed kind of funny having a window cracked, as cold as it was."

"Did you see any tire tracks in the snow before you started to work?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am. Lots of tire tracks in the snow."

"But you saw no one enter or leave the premises."

"Just some woman the police told me later was Mrs. Petty. She showed up about five thirty, just as I was getting ready to leave."

Winnie switched her gaze from Batton to the three suspects. "So you completed the job at five thirty."

Batton shook his head. "No, ma'am. I didn't get finished until almost seven. I had a little ways to go when I ran out of gas in the snow blower. I had to leave to get the gas can filled up. By the time I got back a half hour later, there was police all over the place. They held me up while they took a whole bunch of pictures of those tire tracks in the last little section of driveway I hadn't cleared off."

There was an audible gasp from Anthony Rever. Barker Williams and Charles Manfeld turned and stared at him.

"Thank you, Mr. Batton," said Winnie, holding her gaze on Rever. "Find yourself a seat, won't you?"

"So you see, gentlemen, the police have pictures of tire tracks that match the tread pattern on each of your automobiles. That fact plus your inability to substantiate your whereabouts at the time of the murder and the possibility that one of you was named as kingpin in Petty's corruption report, make you all prime suspects."

"Okay," sighed Anthony Rever. "So I did stop by to see Randolph to talk about the report. Hell, all the congressmen were curious about it. Why should I be any different? But I swear to you, as soon as I saw the 'Do Not Disturb' sign on his front door, I left. I wasn't there half a minute."

"That may be true in your case, Tony, but not in mine!" yelled Manfeld, jumping to his feet. "I wasn't anywhere near Petty's house on Sunday. Either somebody drove my car to Petty's place or there's been a terrible mistake."

"Sit down, Mr. Manfeld," ordered Thatch, taking a step from his post by the door.

Manfeld quickly responded.

"And you, Mr. Williams?" asked Winnie.

"You saw the photos," replied Barker Williams. "You must know I was there. But I'm like Rever. I saw the sign on the door. I even tried the doorbell, but no one answered. I never saw Randolph Petty that Sunday."

"The tire prints don't lie," said Winnie, looking at each of the suspects. "They place each of you at Petty's home sometime in the morning or early afternoon, the time of the murder. But only one set of prints reveals who the murderer actually is. It's the set of prints that shows which of you visited the Petty house twice that day."

"The police investigators couldn't put it together, but I have. The key ingredients in this case are the partially open window and the telephone. Let me draw a picture of what was going through the murderer's mind: then you'll understand."

"It began when he went to see

Congressman Petty about the corruption report. He knew he was named in that paper and had to do something about it before Petty presented it at the upcoming legislative session. Perhaps he had hoped to bribe or threaten Petty into withdrawing it.

"In any event, the murderer entered the unlocked house and confronted Randolph. Petty refused to back off, so the murderer killed him with the letter opener. Then he took the report and ransacked the study to make certain he had all the incriminating notes and papers.

"At some point, I suspect as he was leaving, the murderer must have realized that the tire tracks left in snow on the driveway would lead the police directly to him. He realized it would take too long to clear the driveway himself and he would risk being seen, so he called a professional snow removal company, one as it happened using gasoline-driven equipment."

"You heard what Batton here said," argued Manfeld. "Petty called him."

"Highly unlikely," said Winnie. "Randolf Petty was a man who was easily distracted and had difficulty concentrating. He would hardly want a snow blower roaring away next to his house when he had important work to do. It had to be the murderer who made the call, no

doubt disguising his voice and using Petty's name. Now if I may continue.

"The murderer went back into the house and hung up the telephone Petty had previously taken off the hook."

"This is madness. I've heard quite..." began Barker Williams.

"Let me finish," interrupted Winnie. "The killer then drove to his home or office, called Ambrose's snow removal company to get Petty's driveway and sidewalk cleared, and then placed a call to the Petty house. While the phone in the study was ringing from his call, he returned to the scene of his crime, picked up the receiver, and set it on the desk. Then he opened a window in the study just a bit."

"Why on earth would the killer do something like that?" asked Amos Batton from the back of the room.

"Because, Mr. Batton, the murderer wanted to be absolutely certain you finished clearing away the snow and the incriminating tire tracks before the body was discovered, but he didn't want to be seen anywhere nearby. Instead, he returned to the location where he had placed the call to the Petty house and simply listened on his telephone for your snow blower to start up, thereby marking your arrival. The win-

dow was left partially open so he could hear it more clearly. After what appeared to the murderer to be a reasonable amount of time for you to clear the snow, he heard your snow blower become silent. He must have assumed you had finished the job and the tracks were eliminated."

Batton let out a silly giggle. "And the truth was I had just run out of gas."

"Precisely," said Winnie. "And the tire tracks remaining in the snow left on the uncleared driveway revealed the tread pattern of the *only* car that made *two round trips* to Petty's house . . . the two round trips an individual would have to make in order for the Petty phone to be hung up, called, and then answered so the receiver could be set on the desk to pick up the noise from your snow blower. The car belonging to the murderer."

Barker Williams suddenly leaped from his chair and bolted for the door. He ran directly into Thatch's bulk and careened to the floor, upsetting the coffee table. He picked up a fallen vase and reared back to throw it at Thatcher.

"By the by, Mr. Williams," said Thatch, pulling a revolver from under his jacket, "have I shown you my new gun?"

Williams got to his knees, still gripping the vase.

"Rather nice except for one problem . . ." continued Thatch, pointing the gun deliberately. "Hair trigger."

Williams let the vase fall.

Winnie summoned the police. They arrived quickly to take Congressman Barker Williams downtown. Afterwards, Winnie brought in tea for her remaining guests. Amos Batton passed up the tea in favor of Thatch's bourbon. Thatch watched in astonishment as Batton slugged down a double shot.

"I say, Mr. Batton. That's rather expensive sipping whisky you've just, uh . . . consumed."

Amos Batton smacked his lips. "'Deed you're right, Mr. Thatcher. I can always tell the good stuff 'cause it tastes better than the stuff I drink."

"Taste?" Thatch snorted. "You never gave your tongue a chance."

"Leave him be," said Winnie. "Mr. Batton deserves whatever he wants."

"Excuse me for asking, Mrs. Thatcher," said Charles Manfeld, "but I don't understand how my tire tracks showed up on Petty's driveway. I was telling the truth when I said I wasn't anywhere near his place that Sunday."

"But *I* wasn't," said Amos Batton, beginning to giggle uncontrollably.

Manfeld looked confused. "Wasn't what?"

"Amos means he wasn't telling the truth, Mr. Manfeld," said Winnie, answering for Amos who was now trying to control his hysterics. "There were no tracks in the driveway. The police never had any photos.

"Mr. Batton *had* finished the job when Mrs. Petty arrived home at five thirty. He and I made up that little story about the snow blower running out of gas to convince the murderer that he had made an error in thinking the snow had been cleared.

"I'm sorry if I caused you any distress, but since I didn't have any idea which of you might be the murderer, I had to make it appear as if all three of you had left tracks."

"Just a moment, my dear," said Thatch. "You told me you knew who the murderer was before I called the congressmen."

"No, I didn't," countered Winnie. "I merely told you to tell them I knew who the murderer was."

Anthony Rever stepped forward. "But how did you know Williams had been listening for the sound of the snow blower on the phone?"

"Simple logic," replied Winnie. "First, there was the partially open window. Only the

murderer would have had a reason to open it on such a cold day. And it wasn't just to bring in the chill.

"Second, Mrs. Petty picked the phone up off the desk to call the ambulance and police. If Mr. Randolph Petty had taken the phone off the hook so he wouldn't be disturbed, he certainly wouldn't have left it on top of his desk."

"Why not?"

Winnie walked over to her phone and picked up the receiver.

Rever chuckled. "I can hear it from here. Dial tone."

"Precisely," said Winnie. "And in some areas, the phone company puts a warbling, high-pitched tone on the line to alert the user that the phone is off the hook. A man as easily distracted as Mr. Petty would hardly have left that on top of his desk."

"Masterfully done, my dear," said Thatch, "even if you did have to tell a fib or two to discover the solution."

"That's us! Right, Mrs. Thatcher?" shouted a rather inebriated Amos Batton, holding his glass up from his slouched position in Thatch's chair. "Just a couple liars fighting for the truth."

"Well put, Mr. Batton," said Winnie. "Well put."

Rambaugh and Ye Olde Bookshoppes, Inc.

by Gary Alexander



Monday morning traffic northbound on I-5 into Seattle was typical. In that lurch-and-brake necklace of commuters was Frank Rambaugh, senior property claims

investigator for Unity Property and Casualty's local office. The radio in his company car was turned to a station whose traffic-spotting helicopter was now circling overhead.

Rambaugh relaxed his hands, flexing them to put color back into his knuckles, and watched the chopper's lazy arcs. It seemed to be mocking him with its mobility. The pilot reported that nothing in particular was causing the problem. No stalled vehicles, no jackknifed semis, nothing like that. Perhaps it was the fire. Motorists appeared to be slowing to-gawk.

The spotter was interrupted by three commercials, a weather forecast, and a skull-throbbing Top Forty hit. By the time the pilot returned, Rambaugh's lane had inched ahead enough that he could see for himself.

To the right of the freeway and below was a rich agricultural valley that had long since been paved over. In this sprawl of asphalt and glass and steel that Rambaugh sourly lumped together as Progress was the Southside Mall.

Smoke hung over the center of the mall, acrid and heavy, indicating to him that the firemen had won, that the flames were extinguished. But a charred hole in the mall roof foretold a major loss. Even if actual fire damage was minimal, smoke would permeate countless dollars' worth of clothing, furniture, and other merchandise. Rambaugh pitied the insurers.

The knowledge that Mother Unity did not have coverage on

the Southside Mall or any of its tenants made the remainder of the commute slightly more bearable.

“**W**e what!”
“Settle down, Frank. Just relax. God knows,

I'm trying to,” said David Oakes, Unity's Seattle claims manager. He was Rambaugh's nominal superior, ten years his junior. Oakes was as thin as a red herring, had the metabolism of a hummingbird. He was upscale, a real comer. Seattle was but an elevator pause at a floor. Oakes had good corporate instincts. He played defense, loath to challenge or offend. He treated Frank Rambaugh like a mine field.

“Ye Olde Bookshoppes,” Rambaugh said. “When did we add that account?”

“Recently,” Oakes said. “Lee Switzer sold it.”

Switzer was Unity's Seattle sales manager. Rambaugh had a quick image of polyester and gold jewelry. “Lee would sell a family auto policy to a demolition derby.”

“Now, Frank, this is a bookstore chain, not a fireworks factory. Pretty good business as far as I can tell.”

“I am familiar with it,” Rambaugh said. “I am a bit of a bibliophile. I peruse bookstores like some men do hardware

stores. Randall Laird runs them as he did his burger stands."

"Quite a success story, isn't it?" Oakes said admiringly. "The guy's still in his late twenties and already a zillionaire. Began washing dishes at a McDonald's in high school, started a restaurant of his own. YumBurgers. They weren't all that bad. Parlayed it into fifteen locations, sold out to a conglomerate, and began a string of bookshops. He's got nineteen of them to date, according to Lee, and is ready to expand out of the Northwest and go nationwide. Impressive."

"They are as standardized and bland as his burgers, David. The fake old English decor and the vending machines in the rear that pass for coffeehouse ambience do not alter the fact that he carries few titles and hypes bestsellers to death. If it does not sell, it has the shelf life of fresh fish. It is impossible to backorder anything. They simply do not care."

"I wouldn't know, Frank. I don't have much time for reading. Nevertheless, the fire originated in Ye Olde Bookshoppes' Southside Mall outlet. We're on it."

"Arson, you said."

"No question. A friend in the fire department called me. They could smell the gasoline."

"I wonder if Mr. Laird's Ye Olde venture has proved

as profitable as YumBurgers."

"Frank, please, no waves! You know better than I that arson as a cause is easy to determine. Proving who did it is another story."

Though Rambaugh worked out of this office, he covered seven states, handling Pacific Division's largest and trickiest losses. Woe be it to a policyholder involved in mischief who drew the senior investigator. More than one was off Mother Unity's books, having neither the means nor the need to pay premiums from a penitentiary cell.

"A convenient fire is the most lucrative form of euthanasia for a terminally ill business."

Rambaugh left Oakes in mid-groan.

The wing of Southside Mall affected by the fire was cordoned off. It was business as usual elsewhere, though with an unwanted aroma in the air. Rambaugh stepped over the rope and surveyed the scene. Not much fire damage, really, except for Ye Olde Bookshoppes. Glass that remained in the sliding doors was smoked black and warped. The fire had been intense and quickly contained.

Jack Harper of the fire marshal's office was there. "Frank, how're you doing? This yours?"

Rambaugh nodded and shook

his hand. They had worked together for more years than either would care to remember. In Rambaugh's view, Harper was the top arson man in town, a true scientist.

"The owner's here. Laird," Harper said. "A pain in the ass if there ever was one. He's prancing around like a banty rooster. He wants an arrest and execution five minutes ago, but we're not quite at that stage of the investigation yet."

"David tells me gasoline."

"And not very subtly done. C'mon."

They entered the bookstore. Virtually nothing was recognizable. The odor of burned paper and plastics made Rambaugh's eyes water.

"Pinning down the source was a cinch, even without test results. Have you ever been in here before?"

"Other stores in the chain but not this one. They're exactly the same. Total interchangeability. Mysteries in the rear. Then science fiction. General fiction and nonfiction along the walls. The hotter titles toward the front."

"Look up, Frank."

Rambaugh did and saw the globe of a large incandescent lamp drooping like an icicle.

"Indeed. The hot spot. Do we know what this pile of ashes beneath it was?"

"According to Laird, a table

with a pyramid of paperbacks. They must've used five gallons of gasoline on it."

A lean, smallish man with thinning hair hurried in, pointed at Rambaugh, snapped his fingers, and said, "Insurance, right? You've got to be the insurance guy. I'm Randy Laird."

Rambaugh was tall and had a middle-age spread. He wore a dark suit, darker tie, white shirt, and hat. He carried the same leather briefcase Mother Unity had issued him upon completion of training. If Laird's recognition was a slam at his appearance, Rambaugh was not insulted. He had no interest in joining the herd in bovine-like pursuit of fashion.

Randall Laird, on the other hand, looked like the prototype for male leads in TV cop shows. The designer casualness was relentless, not a wrinkle or pleat out of place. Rambaugh gave him a business card and asked, "What was here, at the origin of the fire?"

"The latest best seller by this gal who writes jet-set sizzle novels. We were set up for an autograph party today at noon. She's on national tour and we were lucky to get her. I'll bet we would have sold two hundred units."

Units? Laird's synonym for *books* made Rambaugh's teeth ache. "Do you have frequent autograph parties?"

"Yeah. It's good P.R. We do locals a lot, though the big names sell better. I leave it to the branch managers to arrange them. Janet, who runs this store, by the way, went home. I sent her. She was pretty upset."

"When did it start?" Rambaugh asked Harper.

"Midnight, we figure. They jimmied the back door on the parking lot side."

"Lousy security," Laird said. "What do you think, Rambaugh, should we sue the mall?"

"Good security," Harper told him. "They have afterhours people inside. The fire wasn't going five minutes before 911 was called, but with the amount of incendiary material used and the type of merchandise, nobody could've saved the store."

"Why this particular spot to start it, I wonder," Rambaugh said. "With guards in the mall, the center or rear of the store would be much less conspicuous."

"I'll tell you why," Laird said. "Snowe wanted to make a statement. That bastard wanted my store gutted."

"Snowe?"

"Directly across the way. Use your eyes, man."

Rambaugh did and saw TED SNOWE BOOKS. It was empty but for a FOR LEASE banner on the soot-smearred windows.

"He folded his tent last week.

We moved in here in May. It was the beginning of the end for Snowe and he knew it. There's still room for the little independent these days, Rambaugh, but not in a high-volume location like this. He couldn't match our discounts and went belly up. Too bad but, hey, this is America, right? Either you compete or you don't."

"YumBooks," Rambaugh said.

"Cute. Think I haven't heard that one a thousand times before? Harper, why hasn't Snowe been picked up yet? I'd bet a month's net income that he's our boy."

"He'll be interviewed, Mr. Laird."

"Rambaugh, I'll have Janet run you a printout of our inventory. The cash registers are married to the computer. We know what was here down to the last unit."

"Splendid."

"Then how long until I'll be seeing some bucks? I've got business interruption coverage, too, and this mess is costing a bundle."

"Overall, has business been good in your chain, Mr. Laird?"

"Oh, man, I could've guessed it! Yeah, business has been super and I can prove it. If you drag your feet trying to lay this on me, I'll see you in court."

Laird glanced at his watch. "I had to move my flight to Chicago up because of that bastard

Snowe. I'm supposed to be in Chi-town now, checking out leases. We're moving into the Midwest first of the year if all goes well. Keep in touch."

After Laird stalked off, Harper asked Rambaugh, "Do you think he did it? You usually have good instincts?"

"No," Rambaugh said. "I wish, but no."

"How can the policyholder have notified you that I insulted him if he is presently winging eastward at thirty thousand feet?" Rambaugh asked innocently.

They were in David Oakes' office—Rambaugh, Oakes, and Lee Switzer. Adrenaline and cigarette smoke hung heavy in the air. "He phoned me from the airport, Frank," Switzer said. "I heard jets in the background. He said you called him a crook."

"Frank and I have talked about this, Lee," Oakes said. "Frank promised he'd stop calling policyholders crooks."

"This is big premium volume," Switzer said. "Mucho."

"Randall Laird, evidently, is not a crook," Rambaugh said. "I have credit sources. They informed me that while he is leveraged slightly uncomfortably, he is in no immediate danger. The funds received in the YumBurger transaction were

invested in Ye Olde Bookshoppes and stretched a bit thin in light of his rapid expansion, but there are not yet sweaty palms in the investment community."

"Laird told Lee who told me that the firebug is a competitor who went down the tubes because of Ye Olde Bookshoppes," Oakes said.

"I have an appointment with Mr. Snowe this afternoon," Rambaugh said. "I trust that this meeting will not make me tardy."

"Hell, even if he confesses, he's probably broke. We'll never see a dime," Switzer said. "Dave, can we advance-pay a chunk to Randy, so he can get his Southside Mall store back in operation ASAP?"

Oakes looked at Rambaugh. Rambaugh nodded. Oakes nodded to Switzer. "Good. It's been a pleasure. I'll be in my office."

When Switzer was gone, Oakes asked, "Is that the straight scoop you gave Lee? Nothing kinky?"

Rambaugh shrugged.

"So what's the problem, Frank? Your hackles are definitely raised. Why?"

"The man refers to books as units."

Oakes stared blankly at him. "So what?"

Rambaugh got up and walked out.

Ted Snowe lived in an apartment complex near the university. He was a chubby man in his fifties with gray hair and a beard. He was surprisingly cordial, even offering Rambaugh coffee. "You'll have to settle for instant, Mr. Rambaugh. My wife brews great espresso, but she's on her way to work. Swingshift at Boeing. We sold the house to buy the bookstore. The other car, too. Until I can find something, I'm a stranded house-husband, I'm afraid."

"How long were you in business?"

"Two years. I was an associate professor of English with tenure. I decided I had to sell them rather than lecture on them. Hopefully I'll be able to get back on, at least part-time."

"I never visited your store. I'm sorry I didn't."

"What were your tastes in reading?"

"Eclectic," Rambaugh said. "I just finished an Elmore Leonard mystery. Before that, a nonfiction tome on life in the fourteenth century."

Snowe brought coffee and smiled. "I might have made a regular customer out of you. I carried twice as many titles as Ye Olde Bookshoppes. Many specialty books. I sold almost as much on orders as off-the-shelf. Not very smart, though. Vol-

ume is the name of the game, and I didn't have buying clout. People went for the advertising and the discounts and bought from Laird."

"Mr. Snowe, did you burn down his store?"

Snowe laughed. "Mr. Rambaugh, I have been interrogated by the police and the fire department today and none of them asked me that in such direct terms. Apparently their criminology classes taught them to be cagey, to interview you from a side door, hoping to trip you up. No. No, I didn't."

"Your relationship with the Ye Olde Bookshoppes folks?"

"Oh, I quarreled with the chain concept for selfish reasons, but I got along well with Janet Metcalfe, the store manager. She's a sweetheart."

"If not you, then who?"

Snowe laughed again. This time his eyes were not involved. "Perhaps somebody who suffered ptomaine from a Yum-Burger."

Rambaugh went directly home. He arrived past five and was surprised to find an empty house. He was a widower who lived with his son, Richie, a high school senior. Debra, Richie's sister, attended college out of town.

Richie was in charge of din-

ner and the absence of the boy and the odor of scorched food annoyed him. He was in the process of deciding the form of punishment when he remembered to check the kitchen calendar. It was an innovation of the frequently distracted senior investigator, who needed to know his son's schedule and whereabouts, not to mention his own.

Monday. Computer club meeting. Indeed, Richie loved the dratted machines.

Rambaugh microwaved two TV dinners, a Salisbury steak (his favorite) and a fried chicken (distant second). He settled into his recliner, turned on the television, and washed down the meal with hot chocolate.

Next thing he knew, his son was shaking him awake. "Dad."

"Good Lord!" Rambaugh said. "You are late for school."

"Dad, it's nighttime. Look."

Rambaugh blinked and focused on the screen. Orangish licks of flame were erupting from the silhouette of a building.

"Why is it so dark?"

"It's the eleven o'clock news and they're there live."

"But why is the sound on so high?"

"I couldn't hear nothing, Dad. Your snoring was rattling the windows."

"You couldn't hear *anything*," Rambaugh said. The lad

sponged up every math and computer class the school offered, but ask him what a dangling participle was and he would guess it was a new brand of disk drive.

"They say it's the bookstore in the Eastwood Mall. I been there."

"Oh no. Did they happen to mention the name of the store?"

"Yeah. Ye Olde Bookshoppes. It's a neat place. They got those vending machines in the back that give you free soda pop and cocoa. You know, a fake coffee-house thing like they had in the old days. They got this elevator music playing there, harpsichord music or something."

Rambaugh told him about the Southside Mall loss.

"Wow! Some freak hates books maybe."

"Maybe," Rambaugh said. "And what on earth were you doing in a bookstore?"

"They carry a lot of computer magazines."

"Of course."

"The reporter said that a suspect had been taken in for questioning, an unnamed suspect whose own book shop had been driven out of business by Ye Olde Bookshoppes."

"No," Rambaugh told the reporter. "Not him. Impossible."

"Hey, Dad, she can't hear you. Who you talking about?"

"Never mind, son."

"Yeah, but he hated them,

didn't he? You have to hate someone real bad to do this, don't you?"

Rambaugh had an idea. "You do, Richie," he agreed. "You do."

Rambaugh put his belt-pager in the trunk of the company car, wrapping it in old rags. At eight A.M. it was already beeping. Oakes, Switzer, Laird—could be any or all, and at this moment he had no need for distractions.

He drove to the apartment of Janet Metcalfe, YOB's Southside Mall manager. Rambaugh knocked and the door flew open. He presented his business card to a thin, attractive woman in her late twenties.

"Could we talk on the way to the parking lot, Mr. Rambaugh?" she asked. "We have a clean-up crew coming in and I'd like to supervise. The records in my office weren't too badly damaged, and I don't want them carted off to the dump."

Rambaugh said fine and they walked to her car. "It will be a while before you resume operation. That you remain on the payroll in the interim is—"

"A tribute to swell management?" she interrupted. "Good people looking out after their own?"

"Yes—"

"I am, but my staff isn't. It

takes time to train a manager, Mr. Rambaugh. My clerks are expendable. They're fine workers but they can't wait around till we reopen. I'm an expensive investment. I stay, they go."

"Do I sense anger?"

"It wasn't their fault," Janet said. "Randy makes a ton of money. He could get them involved somehow in the rebuilding and restocking. If he cared to."

"You are aware of last night's Eastwood Mall fire?"

"Who isn't? It's on page one in the morning paper. They arrested Ted Snowe. I don't believe it. I don't."

"An amiable sort," Rambaugh said. "He described you as a sweetheart."

"That goes double for him. Ted didn't hold anything against Randy for his going broke. He knows the realities of the business."

"Icicle."

"What?"

"The lamp above the incendiary source became so hot it slumped to resemble an icicle."

"Euphala Nectar."

"Beg pardon?"

"You must not watch talk shows or read the tabloids. Her autograph party was on for yesterday at noon. I have no idea what her real name is. She writes potboilers. Everybody doing *everything* to everyone in five hundred pages and more."

"You led me into my next question. Mr. Laird said that local writers of less sensational reputation are also afforded autograph parties. Did Ms. Nectar's sudden availability cause a postponement or outright cancellation?"

"Are you familiar with Josh Farragut? He's a poet."

"I have difficulty with poetry. My tastes are eclectic, but I demand a beginning, middle, and end. I prefer mysteries and a variety of nonfiction."

"Barbarian. Josh finally got published by a small press. I love him. I arranged the party, but when Nectar breezed into town, well—Bump City, and with a larger than average number of name writers showing on our computer as being on tour, I couldn't firm another date for him. No, you don't think Josh—no!"

"Mr. Laird said his managers have latitude in autograph party scheduling."

"Unless it's bottom line time. When a Euphala Nectar breezes into town, we drop everything. Randy has the final say."

"What does Farragut do besides write verse?"

"He's a grad student at the U and works as a teaching aide in English."

"Where might I locate him?"

Janet consulted a notebook in her purse and gave Rambaugh the address. They were

at her car, which was parked next to Rambaugh's. A muffled beeping noise was coming from his trunk.

"Is that an alarm system?"

"In a sense."

"Well, you need to turn up the volume. You can barely hear it."

Josh Farragut lived with his mother in a small duplex near the university campus. He was tall and pale, about thirty. He wore slacks and a white shirt. His hair was short, his face clean-shaven, his manner polite. He looked like an assistant bookkeeper. Rambaugh had expected Rasputin.

"Come in. I saw you pull up and called 911 to confess. It'll be on their tape and should go in favor at the trial, don't you think?"

The bewildered senior investigator said, yes, doubtless it would. The living room was modestly furnished and incredibly tidy. Floors gleamed. Cheap bric-a-brac sparkled. White sheets covered upholstered furniture. Rambaugh smelled Lysol. He wondered nervously where the mother was. The mother of this son could conceivably emerge from the kitchen with a cleaver.

"I saw your car. It's so ugly and sterile. It couldn't be anything but a plainclothes car."

And you. You're a bull if I ever saw one."

"Beg pardon."

"A dick, a detective. I once wrote a poem called 'Homicide Bull.' It won honorable mention in a poetry competition. Have you read it?"

"No."

"I would have confessed anyhow. Ted Snowe is good people. The knowledge that he was arrested was unbearable."

"I assume, then, that you also set the second fire."

"A diversion, just in case suspicion flew my way. 'Suspicion Flew My Way' is another—"

"You were making a statement against Euphala Nectar, Randall Laird, and the vagaries of book publishing and book marketing?"

"Very definitely. How'd you know?"

"A strong hydrocarbon statement atop Ms. Nectar's alleged literature. You transformed a light bulb into a stalactite. A finger pointing, as it were, at the bull's-eye."

"Excellent metaphor. You have a talent wasted in police bulling." Josh Farragut extended ivory-white arms. "Snap on the cuffs. When Janet said my autograph party was canceled in favor of that illiterate, philistine slut, I knew that for the sake of my art and all others I had to delineate the problem."

"Indeed. Where, please, is your mother?"

"Working. She welds truck frames at Kenworth."

"Of course," Rambaugh said. He heard sirens and the screeching of brakes.

"The cuffs."

"I am not a bull." Rambaugh slipped a business card between two of Josh Farragut's outstretched fingers.

"You insure Randall Laird?"

"Unfortunately."

"It's a tragedy that we can't pin this on him."

Fists were beating on the door. "A semi-tragedy," Rambaugh said as he opened it.

Rambaugh stayed long enough to tell what he knew. Farragut filled in the rest, all the while plugging his poetry. "IncarcerationVille." "Thousand Watt Reading Lamp At HQ." Several others. A writer of mystery and suspense poetry. Rambaugh made a mental note to search for the man's work.

Rambaugh went to his car. The pager continued to beep. Its batteries were low and it sounded like a suffocating squirrel. He took it from the trunk and placed it behind a rear tire.

He started his company car and backed over it. It crunched, like a large beetle. Rambaugh returned to the office to adjust Ye Olde Bookshoppes, Inc.'s claim.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

In the Fog

(Part I)

by Richard
Harding
Davis

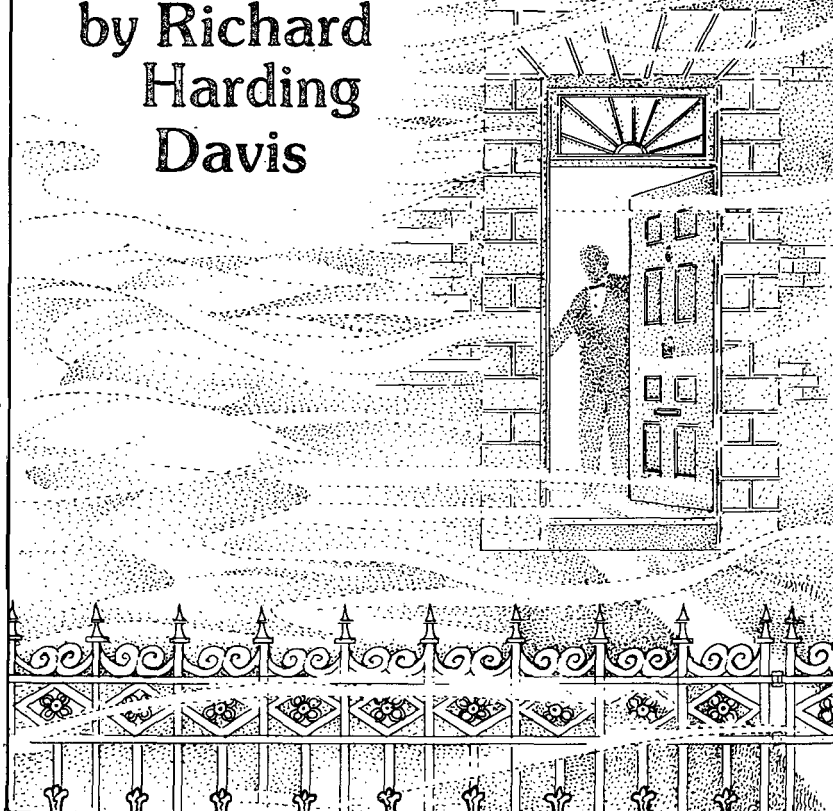


Illustration by Glenn Wolff

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THE STORY OF THE NAVAL ATTACHÉ

The Grill is the club most difficult of access in the world. To be placed on its rolls distinguishes the new member as greatly as though he had received a vacant Garter or had been caricatured in *Vanity Fair*.

Men who belong to the Grill Club never mention that fact. If you ask one of them which club he frequents, he will name all save that particular one. He is afraid if he told you he belonged to the Grill that it would sound like boasting.

The Grill Club dates back to the days when Shakespeare's theater stood on the present site of the *Times* office. It has a golden grill which Charles the Second presented to the club, and the original manuscript of "Tom and Jerry in London," which was bequeathed to it by Pierce Egan himself. The members when they write letters at the club still use sand to blot the ink.

The Grill enjoys the distinction of having without political prejudice blackballed a prime minister of each party. At the same sitting at which one of these fell, it elected, on account of his brogue and his bulls, Quiller, the queen's counsellor, who was then a pen-niless barrister.

When Paul Preval, the French artist who came to London by royal command to paint the portrait of the Prince of Wales, was made an honorary member—only foreigners may be honorary members—he said, as he signed his first wine card, "I would rather see my name on that than a picture in the Louvre."

At which Quiller remarked, "That is a devil of a compliment because the only men who can read their names in the Louvre today have been dead fifty years."

On the night after the great fog of 1897 there were five members in the club, four of them busy with supper, and one reading in front of the fireplace. There is only one room to the club and one long table. At the far end of the room the fire of the grill glows red and, when the fat falls, blazes into flame, and at the other there is a broad bow window of diamond panes which looks down upon the street. The four men at the table were strangers to each other, but as they picked at the grilled bones, and sipped their scotch and soda, they conversed with such charming animation that a visitor to the club—which does not tolerate visitors—would have counted them as friends of long acquaintance, certainly not as Englishmen who had met without the form of an introduction and for the first

time. But it is the etiquette and tradition of the Grill that whoever enters it must speak with whomever he finds there. It is to enforce this rule that there is but one long table, and whether there are twenty men at it, or two, the waiters, supporting the rule, will place them side by side.

For this reason the four strangers at supper were seated together, with the candles grouped about them and the long length of the table cutting a white path through the outer gloom of the room.

"I repeat," said the gentleman with the black pearl stud, "that the days for romantic adventure and deeds of foolish daring have passed, and that the fault lies with ourselves. Voyages to the Pole I do not catalogue as adventures. That African explorer, young Chetney, who turned up yesterday after he was supposed to have died in Uganda, did nothing adventurous. He made maps and explored the sources of rivers. He was in constant danger, but the presence of danger does not constitute adventure. Were that so, the chemist who studies high explosives or who investigates deadly poisons passes through adventures daily. No, 'adventures are for the adventurous.' But one no longer ventures. The spirit of it died of inertia. We are grown too practical, too just—above all, too sensible. In this room, for instance, members of the club have, at the sword's point, disputed the proper scanning of one of Pope's couplets. Over so weighty a matter as spilled burgundy on a gentleman's cuff ten men fought across this table, each with his rapier in one hand and a candle in the other. All ten were wounded. The question of the spilled burgundy concerned but two of them. The other eight engaged because they were men of 'spirit.' They were, indeed, the first gentlemen of their day. Tonight, were you to spill burgundy on my cuff, were you even to insult me grossly, these gentlemen would not consider it incumbent upon them to kill each other. They would separate us and appear as witnesses against us at Bow Street tomorrow morning. We have here tonight, in the persons of Sir Andrew and myself, an illustration of how the ways have changed."

The men around the table turned and glanced toward the gentleman in front of the fireplace. He was an elderly and somewhat portly person, with a kindly, wrinkled countenance which wore continually a smile of almost childish confidence and good nature. It was a face which the illustrated prints had made intimately familiar. He held a book from him at arm's length, as though to adjust it to his eyesight, and his brows were knit with interest.

"Now, were this the eighteenth century," continued the gentleman with the black pearl, "when Sir Andrew left the club tonight I would have him bound and gagged and thrown into a sedan chair. The watch would not interfere, the passersby would take to their heels, my hired bullies and ruffians would convey him to some lonely spot where we would guard him until morning. Nothing would come of it, except added reputation to myself as a gentleman of adventurous spirit, and possibly an essay in the *Tatler*, with stars for names, entitled, let us say, 'The Budget and the Baronet.'"

"But to what end, sir?" inquired the youngest of the members. "And why Sir Andrew, of all persons—why should you select him for this adventure?"

The gentleman with the black pearl shrugged his shoulders.

"It would prevent him speaking in the House tonight. The Navy Increase Bill," he added gloomily. "It is a government measure, and Sir Andrew speaks for it. And so great is his influence and so large his following that if he does"—the gentleman laughed ruefully—"if he does, it will go through. Now, had I the spirit of our ancestors," he exclaimed, "I would bring chloroform from the nearest chemist and drug him in that chair. I would tumble his unconscious form into a hansom cab and hold him prisoner until daylight. If I did, I would save the British taxpayer the cost of five more battleships, some many millions of pounds."

All the gentlemen again turned and surveyed the baronet with freshened interest. The honorary member of the Grill, whose accent had already betrayed him as an American, laughed softly.

"To look at him now," he said, "one would not guess he was deeply concerned with the affairs of state."

The others nodded silently.

"He has not lifted his eyes from that book since we first entered," added the youngest member. "He surely cannot mean to speak tonight."

"Oh, yes, he will speak," muttered the one with the black pearl moodily. "During these last hours of the session the House sits late, but when the Navy Bill comes up on its third reading he will be in his place—and he will pass it."

The fourth member, a stout and florid gentleman of a somewhat sporting appearance, in a short smoking jacket and black tie, sighed enviously.

"Fancy one of us being as cool as that, if he knew he had to stand up within an hour and rattle off a speech in Parliament. I'd be in

a devil of a funk myself. And yet he is as keen over that book he's reading as though he had nothing before him until bedtime."

"Yes, see how eager he is," whispered the youngest member. "He does not lift his eyes even now when he cuts the pages. It is probably an admiralty report, or some other weighty work of statistics which bears upon his speech."

The gentleman with the black pearl laughed morosely.

"The weighty work in which the eminent statesman is so deeply engrossed," he said, "is called *The Great Rand Robbery*. It is a detective novel for sale at all bookstalls."

The American raised his eyebrows in disbelief.

"*The Great Rand Robbery*?" he repeated incredulously. "What an odd taste!"

"It is not a taste, it is his vice," returned the gentleman with the pearl stud. "It is his one dissipation. He is noted for it. You, as a stranger, could hardly be expected to know of this idiosyncrasy. Mr. Gladstone sought relaxation in the Greek poets, Sir Andrew finds his in Gaboriau. Since I have been a member of Parliament I have never seen him in the library without a shilling shocker in his hands. He brings them even into the sacred precincts of the House, and from the government benches reads them concealed inside his hat. Once started on a tale of murder, robbery, and sudden death, nothing can tear him from it, not even the call of the division bell, nor of hunger, nor the prayers of the party whip. He gave up his country house because when he journeyed to it in the train he would become so absorbed in his detective stories that he was invariably carried past his station." The member of Parliament twisted his pearl stud nervously and bit at the edge of his mustache. "If it only were the first pages of *The Rand Robbery* that he were reading now," he murmured bitterly, "instead of the last! With such another book as that, I swear I could hold him there until morning. There would be no need of chloroform then to keep him from the House."

The eyes of all were fastened upon Sir Andrew, and they saw with fascination that with his forefinger he was now separating the last two pages of the book. The member of Parliament struck the table softly with his open palm.

"I would give a hundred pounds," he whispered, "if I could place in his hands at this moment a new story of Sherlock Holmes—a thousand pounds!" he added wildly. "Five thousand pounds!"

The American observed the speaker sharply, as though the words

bore to him some special application, and then, at an idea which apparently had but just come to him, smiled in great embarrassment.

Sir Andrew ceased reading, but, as though still under the influence of the book, sat looking blankly into the open fire. For a brief space no one moved, until the baronet withdrew his eyes and, with a sudden start of recollection, felt anxiously for his watch. He scanned its face eagerly and scrambled briskly to his feet.

The voice of the American instantly broke the silence in a high, nervous accent.

"And yet Sherlock Holmes himself," he cried, "could not decipher the mystery which tonight baffles the police of London."

At these unexpected words, which carried in them something of the tone of a challenge, the gentlemen about the table started as suddenly as though the American had fired a pistol in the air, and Sir Andrew halted abruptly and stood observing him with grave surprise.

The gentleman with the black pearl was the first to recover.

"Yes, yes," he said eagerly, throwing himself across the table. "A mystery that baffles the police of London? I had heard nothing of it. Tell us at once, pray do—tell us at once."

The American flushed uncomfortably and picked uneasily at the tablecloth.

"No one but the police has heard of it," he murmured, "and they only through me. It is a remarkable crime, to which, unfortunately, I am the only person who can bear witness. Because I am the only witness, I am, in spite of my immunity as a diplomat, detained in London by the authorities of Scotland Yard. My name," he said, inclining his head politely, "is Sears—Lieutenant Ripley Sears, of the United States Navy, at present naval attaché to the Court of Russia. Had I not been detained today by the police, I would have started this morning for Petersburg."

The gentleman with the black pearl interrupted with so pronounced an exclamation of excitement and delight that the American stammered and ceased speaking.

"Do you hear, Sir Andrew?" cried the member of Parliament jubilantly. "An American diplomat halted by our police because he is the only witness of a most remarkable crime—the most remarkable crime, I believe you said, sir," he added, bending eagerly toward the naval officer, "which has occurred in London in many years."

The American moved his head in assent and glanced at the two other members. They were looking doubtfully at him, and the face of each showed that he was greatly perplexed.

Sir Andrew advanced to within the light of the candles and drew a chair toward him.

"The crime must be exceptional indeed," he said, "to justify the police in interfering with a representative of a friendly power. If I were not forced to leave at once, I should take the liberty of asking you to tell us the details."

The gentleman with the pearl pushed the chair toward Sir Andrew and motioned him to be seated.

"You cannot leave us now," he exclaimed. "Mr. Sears is just about to tell us of this remarkable crime."

He nodded vigorously at the naval officer and the American, after first glancing doubtfully toward the servants at the far end of the room, and leaned forward across the table. The others drew their chairs nearer and bent toward him. The baronet glanced irresolutely at his watch, and with an exclamation of annoyance snapped down the lid. "They can wait," he muttered. He seated himself quickly and nodded at Lieutenant Sears.

"If you will be so kind as to begin, sir," he said impatiently.

"Of course," said the American, "you understand that I understand that I am speaking to gentlemen. The confidences of the club are inviolate. Until the police give the facts to the public press, I must consider you my confederates. You have heard nothing and you know no one connected with this mystery. Even I must remain anonymous."

The gentlemen seated around him nodded gravely.

"Of course," the baronet assented with eagerness, "of course."

"We will refer to it," said the gentleman with the black pearl, "as 'The Story of the Naval Attaché.'"

"I arrived in London two days ago," said the American, "and I engaged a room at the Bath Hotel. I know very few people in London, and even the members of our embassy were strangers to me. But in Hong Kong I had become great pals with an officer in your navy, who has since retired, and who is now living in a small house in Rutland Gardens, opposite the Knightsbridge Barracks. I telegraphed him that I was in London, and yesterday morning I received a most hearty invitation to dine with him the same evening at his house. He is a bachelor, so we dined alone and talked over all our old days on the Asiatic Station, and of the changes

which had come to us since we had last met there. As I was leaving the next morning for my post at Petersburg, and had many letters to write, I told him, about ten o'clock, that I must get back to the hotel, and he sent out his servant to call a hansom.

"For the next quarter of an hour, as we sat talking, we could hear the cab whistle sounding violently from the doorstep, but apparently with no result.

"'It cannot be that the cabmen are on strike,' my friend said, as he rose and walked to the window.

"He pulled back the curtains and at once called to me.

"'You have never seen a London fog, have you?' he asked. 'Well, come here. This is one of the best, or, rather, one of the worst, of them.' I joined him at the window, but I could see nothing. Had I not known that the house looked out upon the street, I would have believed that I was facing a dead wall. I raised the sash and stretched out my head, but still I could see nothing. Even the light of the street lamps opposite, and in the upper windows of the barracks, had been smothered in the yellow mist. The lights of the room in which I stood penetrated the fog only to the distance of a few inches from my eyes.

"Below me the servant was still sounding his whistle, but I could afford to wait no longer, and told my friend that I would try and find the way to my hotel on foot. He objected, but the letters I had to write were for the Navy Department, and, besides, I had always heard that to be out in a London fog was the most wonderful experience, and I was curious to investigate one for myself.

"My friend went with me to his front door and laid down a course for me to follow. I was first to walk straight across the street to the brick wall of the Knightsbridge Barracks. I was then to feel my way along the wall until I came to a row of houses set back from the sidewalk. They would bring me to a cross street. On the other side of this street was a row of shops which I was to follow until they joined the iron railings of Hyde Park. I was to keep to the railings until I reached the gates at Hyde Park Corner, where I was to lay a diagonal course across Piccadilly and tack in toward the railings of Green Park. At the end of these railings, going east, I would find the Walsingham and my own hotel.

"To a sailor the course did not seem difficult, so I bade my friend goodnight and walked forward until my feet touched the wooden paving. I continued upon it until I reached the curbing of the sidewalk. A few steps further my hands struck the wall of the barracks.

I turned in the direction from which I had just come, and saw a square of faint light cut into the yellow fog. I shouted, 'All right!' and my friend's voice answered, 'Good luck to you!' The light from his open door disappeared with a bang, and I was left alone in a dripping, yellow darkness. I have been in the navy for ten years, but I have never known such a fog as that of last night, not even among the icebergs of Bering Sea. There one could at least see the light of the binnacle, but last night I could not even distinguish the hand by which I guided myself along the barrack wall. At sea, a fog is a natural phenomenon. It is as familiar as the rainbow which follows a storm, it is as proper that a fog should spread upon the waters as that steam shall rise from the kettle. But a fog which springs from the paved streets, that rolls between solid housefronts, that forces cabs to move at half speed, that drowns policemen and extinguishes the electric lights of the music hall, that is to me incomprehensible. It is as out of place as a tidal wave on Broadway.

"As I felt my way along the wall, I encountered other men who were coming from the opposite direction, and each time when we hailed each other I stepped away from the wall to make room for them to pass. But the third time I did this, when I reached out my hand, the wall had disappeared, and the further I moved to find it the further I seemed to be sinking into space. I had the unpleasant conviction that at any moment I might step over a precipice. Since I had set out I had heard no traffic in the street, and now, although I listened some minutes, I could only distinguish the occasional footfalls of pedestrians. Several times I called aloud, and once a jocular gentleman answered me, but only to ask me where I thought I was, and then even he was swallowed up in the silence. Just above me I could make out a jet of gas which I guessed came from a street lamp, and I moved over to that, and, while I tried to recover my bearings, kept my hand on the iron post. Except for this flicker of gas, no larger than the tip of my finger, I could distinguish nothing about me. For the rest, the mist hung between me and the world like a damp and heavy blanket.

"I could hear voices, but I could not tell whence they came, and the scrape of a foot moving cautiously or a muffled cry as someone stumbled were the only sounds that reached me.

"I decided that I had best remain where I was until someone took me in tow, and it must have been for ten minutes that I waited, straining my ears and hailing distant footfalls. In a house near me some people were dancing to the music of a Hungarian band. I even

fancied I could hear the windows shake to the rhythm of their feet, but I could not make out from which part of the compass the sounds came. And sometimes, as the music rose, it seemed close at my hand, and again, to be floating high in the air above my head. Although I was surrounded by thousands of householders —thirteen—I was as completely lost as though I had been set down by night in the Sahara Desert. There seemed to be no use in waiting longer for an escort, so I again set out and at once bumped against a low iron fence. At first I believed this to be an area railing, but on following it I found that it stretched for a long distance, and that it was pierced at regular intervals with gates. I was standing uncertainly, with my hand on one of these, when a square of light suddenly opened in the night, and in it I saw, as you see a picture thrown by a biograph in a darkened theater, a young gentleman in evening dress, and at the back of him the lights of a hall. I guessed from its elevation and distance from the sidewalk that this light must come from the door of a house set back from the street, and I determined to approach it and ask the young man to tell me where I was. But in fumbling with the lock of the gate I instinctively bent my head, and when I raised it again the door had partly closed, leaving only a narrow shaft of light. Whether the young man had re-entered the house or had left it, I could not tell, but I hastened to open the gate, and as I stepped forward I found myself upon an asphalt walk. At the same instant there was the sound of quick steps upon the path and someone rushed past me. I called to him, but he made no reply, and I heard the gate click and the footsteps hurrying away upon the sidewalk.

"Under other circumstances the young man's rudeness, and his recklessness in dashing so hurriedly through the mist, would have struck me as peculiar, but everything was so distorted by the fog that at the moment I did not consider it. The door was still as he had left it, partly open. I went up the path, and after much fumbling found the knob of the doorbell and gave it a sharp pull. The bell answered me from a great depth and distance, but no movement followed from inside the house, and although I pulled the bell again and again I could hear nothing save the dripping of the mist about me. I was anxious to be on my way, but unless I knew my way there was little chance of my making any speed, and I was determined that until I learned my bearings I would not venture back into the fog. So I pushed the door open and stepped into the house.

"I found myself in a long and narrow hall upon which doors

opened from either side. At the end of the hall was a staircase with a balustrade which ended in a sweeping curve. The balustrade was covered with heavy Persian rugs, and the walls of the hall were also hung with them. The door on my left was closed, but the one nearer me on the right was open, and as I stepped opposite to it I saw that it was a sort of reception or waiting room, and that it was empty. The door below it was also open, and with the idea that I would surely find someone there I walked on up the hall. I was in evening dress, and I felt I did not look like a burglar, so I had no great fear that, should I encounter one of the inmates of the house, he would shoot me on sight. The second door in the hall opened into a dining room. This was also empty. One person had been dining at the table, but the cloth had not been cleared away, and a flickering candle showed half-filled wine glasses and the ashes of cigarettes. The greater part of the room was in complete darkness.

"By this time I had grown conscious of the fact that I was wandering about in a strange house, and that apparently I was alone in it. The silence of the place began to try my nerves, and in a sudden, unexplainable panic I started for the open street. As I turned, I saw a man sitting on a bench which the curve of the balustrade had hidden from me. His eyes were shut and he was sleeping soundly.

"The moment before I had been bewildered because I could see no one, but at sight of this man I was much more bewildered.

"He was a very large man, a giant in height, with long, yellow hair which hung below his shoulders. He was dressed in a red silk shirt that was belted at the waist and hung outside black velvet trousers which, in turn, were stuffed into high, black boots. I recognized the costume at once as that of a Russian servant in his native livery, but what he could be doing in a private house in Knightsbridge was incomprehensible.

"I advanced and touched the man on the shoulder, and, after an effort, he awoke and, on seeing me, sprang to his feet and began bowing rapidly and making deprecatory gestures. I had picked up enough Russian in Petersburg to make out that the man was apologizing for having fallen asleep, and I also was able to explain to him that I desired to see his master.

"He nodded vigorously and said, 'Will the Excellency come this way? The princess is here.'

"I distinctly made out the word 'princess,' and I was a good deal

embarrassed. I had thought it would be easy enough to explain my intrusion to a man; but how a woman would look at it was another matter, and as I followed him down the hall I was somewhat puzzled. As we advanced he noticed that the front door was standing open, and, giving an exclamation of surprise, hastened toward it and closed it. Then he rapped twice on the door of what was apparently the drawing room. There was no reply to his knock, and he tapped again, and then timidly, and cringing subserviently, opened the door and stepped inside. He withdrew himself almost at once and stared stupidly at me, shaking his head.

"'She is not there,' he said. He stood for a moment gazing blankly through the open door and then hastened toward the dining room. The solitary candle which still burned there seemed to assure him that the room also was empty. He came back and bowed me toward the drawing room. 'She is above,' he said; 'I will inform the princess of the Excellency's presence.'

"Before I could stop him he had turned and was running up the staircase, leaving me alone at the open door of the drawing room. I decided that the adventure had gone quite far enough, and if I had been able to explain to the Russian that I had lost my way in the fog, and now only wanted to get back into the street again, I would have left the house on the instant.

"Of course, when I first rang the bell of the house I had no other expectation than that it would be answered by a parlormaid who would direct me on my way. I certainly could not then foresee that I would disturb a Russian princess in her boudoir, or that I might be thrown out by her athletic bodyguard. Still I thought I ought not now to leave the house without making some apology, and, if the worst should come, I could show my card. They could hardly believe that a member of an embassy had any designs upon the hat rack.

"The room in which I stood was dimly lighted, but I could see that, like the hall, it was hung with heavy Persian rugs. The corners were filled with palms, and there was the unmistakable odor in the air of Russian cigarettes and strange, dry scents that carried me back to the bazaars of Vladivostock. Near the front windows was a grand piano, and at the other end of the room a heavily carved screen of some black wood, picked out with ivory. The screen was overhung with a canopy of silken draperies and formed a sort of alcove. In front of the alcove was spread the white skin of a polar bear, and set on that was one of those low Turkish coffee tables.

It held a lighted spirit lamp and two gold coffee cups. I had heard no movement from above stairs, and it must have been fully three minutes that I stood waiting, noting these details of the room and wondering at the delay and at the strange silence.

"And then, suddenly, as my eye grew more used to the half-light, I saw, projecting from behind the screen as though it were stretched along the back of a divan, the hand of a man and the lower part of his arm. I was as startled as though I had come across a footprint on a deserted island. Evidently the man had been sitting there ever since I had come into the room, even since I had entered the house, and he had heard the servant knocking upon the door. Why he had not declared himself I could not understand, but I supposed that possibly he was a guest, with no reason to interest himself in the princess's other visitors, or perhaps, for some reason, he did not wish to be observed. I could see nothing of him except his hand, but I had an unpleasant feeling that he had been peering at me through the carving in the screen, and that he was still doing so. I moved my feet noisily on the floor and said tentatively, 'I beg your pardon.'

"There was no reply, and the hand did not stir. Apparently the man was bent upon ignoring me, but as all I wished was to apologize for my intrusion and to leave the house, I walked up to the alcove and peered around it. Inside the screen was a divan piled with cushions, and on the end of it nearer me the man was sitting. He was a young Englishman with light yellow hair and a deeply bronzed face. He was seated with his arms stretched out along the back of the divan, and with his head resting against a cushion. His attitude was one of complete ease. But his mouth had fallen open, and his eyes were set with an expression of utter horror. At the first glance I saw that he was quite dead.

"For a flash of time I was too startled to act, but in the same flash I was convinced that the man had met his death from no accident, that he had not died through any ordinary failure of the laws of Nature. The expression on his face was much too terrible to be misinterpreted. It spoke as eloquently as words. It told me that before the end had come he had watched his death approach and threaten him.

"I was so sure he had been murdered that I instinctively looked on the floor for the weapon, and, at the same moment, out of concern for my own safety, quickly behind me; but the silence of the house continued unbroken."

"I have seen a great number of dead men; I was on the Asiatic Station during the Japanese-Chinese war. I was in Port Arthur after the massacre. So a dead man for the single reason that he is dead does not repel me, and, though I knew that there was no hope that this man was alive, still, for decency's sake, I felt his pulse, and while I kept my ears alert for any sound from the floors above me, I pulled open his shirt and placed my hand upon his heart. My fingers instantly touched upon the opening of a wound, and as I withdrew them I found them wet with blood. He was in evening dress, and in the wide bosom of his shirt I found a narrow slit, so narrow that in the dim light it was scarcely discernible. The wound was no wider than the smallest blade of a pocket knife, but when I stripped the shirt away from the chest and left it bare, I found that the weapon, narrow as it was, had been long enough to reach his heart. There is no need to tell you how I felt as I stood by the body of this boy (for he was hardly older than a boy), or of the thoughts that came into my head. I was bitterly sorry for this stranger, bitterly indignant at his murderer, and, at the same time, selfishly concerned for my own safety and for the notoriety which I saw was sure to follow. My instinct was to leave the body where it lay and to hide myself in the fog, but I also felt that since a succession of accidents had made me the only witness to a crime, my duty was to make myself a good witness and to assist to establish the facts of this murder.

"That it might possibly be a suicide, and not a murder, did not disturb me for a moment. The fact that the weapon had disappeared and the expression on the boy's face were enough to convince at least me that he had had no hand in his own death. I judged it, therefore, of the first importance to discover who was in the house, or, if they had escaped from it, who had been in the house before I entered it. I had seen one man leave it; but all I could tell of him was that he was a young man, that he was in evening dress, and that he had fled in such haste that he had not stopped to close the door behind him.

"The Russian servant I had found apparently asleep, and, unless he acted a part with supreme skill, he was a stupid and ignorant boor and as innocent of the murder as myself. There was still the Russian princess whom he had expected to find, or had pretended to expect to find, in the same room with the murdered man. I judged that she must now be either upstairs with the servant, or that she had, without his knowledge, already fled from the house. When I

recalled his apparently genuine surprise at not finding her in the drawing room; this latter supposition seemed the more probable. Nevertheless, I decided that it was my duty to make a search, and after a second hurried look for the weapon among the cushions of the divan and upon the floor, I cautiously crossed the hall and entered the dining room.

"The single candle was still flickering in the draught, and showed only the white cloth. The rest of the room was draped in shadows. I picked up the candle and, lifting it high above my head, moved round the corner of the table. Either my nerves were on such a stretch that no shock could strain them further, or my mind was inoculated to horrors; for I did not cry out at what I saw nor retreat from it. Immediately at my feet was the body of a beautiful woman, lying at full length upon the floor, her arms flung out on either side of her, and her white face and shoulders gleaming dully in the unsteady light of the candle. Around her throat was a great chain of diamonds, and the light played upon these and made them flash and blaze in tiny flames. But the woman who wore them was dead, and I was so certain as to how she had died that without an instant's hesitation I dropped on my knees beside her and placed my hand above her heart. My fingers again touched the thin slit of a wound. I had no doubt in my mind but that this was the Russian princess, and when I lowered the candle to her face I was assured that this was so. Her features showed the finest lines of both the Slav and the Jewess, the eyes were black, the hair blueblack and wonderfully heavy, and her skin, even in death, was rich in color. She was a surpassingly beautiful woman.

"I rose and tried to light another candle with the one I held, but I found that my hand was so unsteady that I could not keep the wicks together. It was my intention to again search for this strange dagger which had been used to kill both the English boy and the beautiful princess, but before I could light the second candle I heard footsteps descending the stairs, and the Russian servant appeared in the doorway.

"My face was in darkness, or I am sure that at the sight of it he would have taken alarm, for at that moment I was not sure but that this man himself was the murderer. His own face was plainly visible to me in the light from the hall, and I could see that it wore an expression of dull bewilderment. I stepped quickly toward him and took a firm hold upon his wrist.

"'She is not there,' he said. 'The princess has gone. They have all gone.'

"Who have gone?" I demanded. 'Who else has been here?'

"The two Englishmen.'

"What two Englishmen?" I demanded. 'What are their names?'

"The man now saw by my manner that some question of great moment hung upon his answer, and he began to protest that he did not know the names of the visitors, and that until the evening he had never seen them.

"I guessed that it was my tone which frightened him, so I took my hand off his wrist and spoke less eagerly.

"How long have they been here?" I asked, 'and when did they go?'

"He pointed behind him toward the drawing-room.

"One sat there with the princess,' he said; 'the other came after I had placed the coffee in the drawing room. The two Englishmen talked together, and the princess returned here to the table. She sat there in that chair, and I brought her cognac and cigarettes. Then I sat outside upon the bench. It was a feast day and I had been drinking. Pardon, Excellency, but I fell asleep. When I woke, your Excellency was standing by me, but the princess and the two Englishmen had gone. That is all I know.'

"I believed that the man was telling me the truth. His fright had passed, and he was now apparently puzzled, but not alarmed.

"You must remember the names of the Englishmen,' I urged. "Try to think. When you announced them to the princess, what name did you give?"

"At this question he exclaimed with pleasure, and, beckoning to me, ran hurriedly down the hall and into the drawing room. In the corner furthest from the screen was the piano, and on it was a silver tray. He picked this up and, smiling with pride at his own intelligence, pointed at two cards that lay upon it. I took them up and read the names engraved upon them."

The American paused abruptly and glanced at the faces about him. "I read the names," he repeated. He spoke with great reluctance.

"Continue!" cried the baronet sharply.

"I read the names," said the American, with evident distaste, "and the family name of each was the same. They were the names of two brothers. One is well known to you. It is that of the African explorer of whom this gentleman was just speaking. I mean the Earl of Chetney. The other was the name of his brother, Lord Arthur Chetney."

The men at the table fell back as though a trapdoor had fallen

open at their feet. "Lord Chetney!" they exclaimed in chorus. They glanced at each other and back to the American with every expression of concern and disbelief.

"It is impossible!" cried the baronet. "Why, my dear sir, young Chetney only arrived from Africa yesterday. It was so stated in the evening papers."

The jaw of the American set in a resolute square and he pressed his lips together.

"You are perfectly right, sir," he said, "Lord Chetney did arrive in London yesterday morning, and yesterday night I found his dead body."

The youngest member present was the first to recover. He seemed much less concerned over the identity of the murdered man than at the interruption of the narrative.

"Oh! please let him go on!" he cried. "What happened then? You say you found two visiting cards. How do you know which card was that of the murdered man?"

The American, before he answered, waited until the chorus of exclamations had ceased. Then he continued as though he had not been interrupted.

"The instant I read the names upon the cards," he said, "I ran to the screen and, kneeling beside the dead man, began a search through his pockets. My hand at once fell upon a card case, and I found on all the cards it contained the title of the Earl of Chetney. His watch and cigarette case also bore his name. These evidences, and the fact of his bronzed skin, and that his cheekbones were worn with fever, convinced me that the dead man was the African explorer, and the boy who had fled past me in the night was Arthur, his younger brother.

"I was so intent upon my search that I had forgotten the servant, and I was still on my knees when I heard a cry behind me. I turned and saw the man gazing down at the body in abject and unspeakable horror.

"Before I could rise, he gave another cry of terror and, flinging himself into the hall, raced toward the door to the street. I leaped after him, shouting to him to halt, but before I could reach the hall he had torn open the door and I saw him spring out into the yellow fog.

"I cleared the steps in a jump and ran down the garden walk, but just as the gate clicked in front of me. I had it open on the instant, and, following the sound of the man's footsteps, I raced

after him across the open street. He, also, could hear me, and he instantly stopped running, and there was absolute silence. He was so near that I almost fancied I could hear him panting, and I held my own breath to listen. But I could distinguish nothing but the dripping of the mist about us, and from far off the music of the Hungarian band, which I had heard when I first lost myself.

"All I could see was the square of light from the door I had left open behind me and a lamp in the hall beyond it flickering in the draught. But even as I watched it the flame of the lamp was blown violently to and fro, and the door, caught in the same current of air, closed slowly. I knew if it shut I could not again enter the house, and I rushed madly toward it. I believe I even shouted out, as though it were something human which I could compel to obey me, and then I caught my foot against the curb and smashed into the sidewalk. When I rose to my feet I was dizzy and half stunned, and though I thought then that I was moving toward the door, I know now that I probably turned directly from it; for, as I groped about in the night, calling frantically for the police, my fingers touched nothing but the dripping fog, and the iron railings for which I sought seemed to have melted away. For many minutes I beat the mist with my arms like a man at blind man's bluff, turning sharply in circles, cursing aloud at my stupidity, and crying continually for help. At last a voice answered me from the fog, and I found myself held in the circle of a policeman's lantern.

"That is the end of my adventure. What I have to tell you now is what I learned from the police.

"At the station house to which the man guided me I related what you have just heard. I told them that the house they must at once find was one set back with others from the street within a radius of two hundred yards from the Knightsbridge Barracks, that within fifty yards of it someone was giving a dance to the music of a Hungarian band, and that the railings in front of it were about as high as a man's waist and filed to a point. With that to work upon, twenty men were at once ordered out into the fog to search for the house, and Inspector Lyle himself was dispatched to the home of Lord Edam, Chetney's father, with a warrant for Lord Arthur's arrest. I was thanked and dismissed on my own recognizance.

"This morning, Inspector Lyle called on me, and from him I learned the police theory of the scene I have just described.

"Apparently I had wandered very far in the fog, for up to noon today the house had not been found, nor had they been able to

arrest Lord Arthur. He did not return to his father's house last night, and there is no trace of him; but from what the police knew of the past lives of the people I found in that lost house they have evolved a theory, and their theory is that the murders were committed by Lord Arthur.

"The infatuation of his elder brother, Lord Chetney, for a Russian princess, so Inspector Lyle tells me, is well known to everyone. About two years ago the Princess Zichy, as she calls herself, and he were constantly together, and Chetney informed his friends that they were about to be married. The woman was notorious in two continents, and when Lord Edam heard of his son's infatuation he appealed to the police for her record.

"It is through his having applied to them that they know so much concerning her and her relations with the Chetneys. From the police Lord Edam learned that Madame Zichy had once been a spy in the employ of the Russian Third Section, but that lately she had been repudiated by her own government and was living by her wits, by blackmail, and by her beauty. Lord Edam laid this record before his son, but Chetney either knew it already, or the woman persuaded him not to believe in it, and the father and son parted in great anger. Two days later the marquis altered his will, leaving all his money to the younger brother, Arthur.

"The title and some of the landed property he could not keep from Chetney, but he swore if his son saw the woman again, that the will should stand as it was and he would be left without a penny.

"This was about eighteen months ago, when apparently Chetney tired of the princess and suddenly went off to shoot and explore in Central Africa. No word came from him, except that twice he was reported as having died of fever in the jungle, and finally two traders reached the coast who said they had seen his body. This was accepted by all as conclusive, and young Arthur was recognized as the heir to the Edam millions. On the strength of this supposition he at once began to borrow enormous sums from the moneylenders. This is of great importance, as the police believe it was these debts which drove him to the murder of his brother. Yesterday, as you know, Lord Chetney suddenly returned from the grave, and it was the fact that for two years he had been considered as dead which lent such importance to his return, and which gave rise to those columns of detail concerning him which appeared in all the afternoon papers. But, obviously, during his absence he had not tired

of the Princess Zichy, for we know that a few hours after he reached London he sought her out. His brother, who had also learned of his reappearance through the papers, probably suspected which would be the house he would first visit, and followed him there, arriving, so the Russian servant tells us, while the two were at coffee in the drawing room. The princess then, we also learn from the servant, withdrew to the dining room, leaving the brothers together. What happened one can only guess.

"Lord Arthur knew now that when it was discovered he was no longer the heir the moneylenders would come down upon him. The police believe that he at once sought out his brother to beg for money to cover the *post obits*, but that, considering the sum he needed was several hundreds of thousands of pounds, Chetney refused to give it to him. No one knew that Arthur had gone to seek out his brother. They were alone. It is possible, then, that in a passion of disappointment, and crazed with the disgrace which he saw before him, young Arthur made himself the heir beyond further question. The death of his brother would have availed nothing if the woman remained alive. It is then possible that he crossed the hall and, with the same weapon which made him Lord Edam's heir, destroyed the solitary witness to the murder. The only other person who could have seen it was sleeping in a drunken stupor, to which fact undoubtedly he owed his life. And yet," concluded the naval attaché, leaning forward and marking each word with his finger, "Lord Arthur blundered fatally. In his haste he left the door of the house open, so giving access to the first passerby, and he forgot that when he entered it he had handed his card to the servant. That piece of paper may yet send him to the gallows. In the meantime he has disappeared completely, and somewhere, in one of the millions of streets of this great capital, in a locked and empty house, lies the body of his brother, and of the woman his brother loved, undiscovered, unburied, and with their murder unavenged."

In the discussion which followed the conclusion of the story of the naval attaché the gentleman with the pearl took no part. Instead, he arose and, beckoning a servant to a far corner of the room, whispered earnestly to him until a sudden movement on the part of Sir Andrew caused him to return hurriedly to the table.

"There are several points in Mr. Sears' story I want explained," he cried. "Be seated, Sir Andrew," he begged. "Let us have the opinion of an expert. I do not care what the police think, I want to know what you think."

But Sir Andrew rose reluctantly from his chair.

"I should like nothing better than to discuss this," he said. "But it is most important that I should proceed to the House. I should have been there some time ago." He turned toward the servant and directed him to call a hansom.

The gentleman with the pearl stud looked appealingly at the naval attaché. "There are surely many details that you have not told us," he urged—"some you have forgotten?"

The baronet interrupted quickly.

"I trust not," he said, "for I could not possibly stop to hear them."

"The story is finished," declared the naval attaché. "Until Lord Arthur is arrested or the bodies are found there is nothing more to tell of either Chetney or the Princess Zichy."

"Of Lord Chetney, perhaps not," interrupted the sporting-looking gentleman with the black tie, "but there'll always be something to tell of the Princess Zichy. I know enough stories about her to fill a book. She was a most remarkable woman." The speaker dropped the end of his cigar into his coffee cup and, taking his case from his pocket, selected a fresh one. As he did so he laughed and held up the case that the others could see it. It was an ordinary cigar case of well-worn pigskin, with a silver clasp.

"The only time I ever met her," he said, "she tried to rob me of this."

The baronet regarded him closely.

"She tried to rob you?" he repeated.

"Tried to rob me of this," continued the gentleman in the black tie, "and of the czarina's diamonds." His tone was one of mingled admiration and injury.

"The czarina's diamonds?" exclaimed the baronet. He glanced quickly and suspiciously at the speaker and then at the others about the table. But their faces gave evidence of no other emotion than that of ordinary interest.

"Yes, the czarina's diamonds," repeated the man with the black tie. "It was a necklace of diamonds. I was told to take them to the Russian ambassador in Paris, who was to deliver them at Moscow. I am a Queen's Messenger," he added.

"Oh! I see!" exclaimed Sir Andrew in a tone of relief. "And you say that this same Princess Zichy, one of the victims of this double murder, endeavored to rob you of—of—that cigar case?"

"And the czarina's diamonds," answered the Queen's Messenger imperturbably. "It's not much of a story, but it gives you an idea

of the woman's character. The robbery took place between Paris and Marseilles."

The baronet interrupted him with an abrupt movement.

"No, no!" he cried, shaking his arms in protest, "don't tempt me! I really cannot listen. I must be at the House in ten minutes."

"I am sorry," said the Queen's Messenger. He turned to those seated about him. "I wonder if the other gentlemen—?" he inquired tentatively. There was a chorus of polite murmurs, and the Queen's Messenger, bowing his head in acknowledgment, took a preparatory sip from his glass. At the same moment the servant to whom the man with the black pearl had spoken slipped a piece of paper into his hand. He glanced at it, frowned, and threw it under the table.

The servant bowed to the baronet.

"Your hansom is waiting, Sir Andrew," he said.

"The necklace was worth twenty thousand pounds," began the Queen's Messenger. "It was a present from the Queen of England to celebrate—"

The baronet gave an exclamation of angry annoyance.

"Upon my word, this is most provoking!" he interrupted. "I really ought not to stay. But I certainly mean to hear this." He turned irritably to the servant. "Tell the hansom to wait," he commanded; and, with an air of a boy who is playing truant, slipped guiltily into his chair.

The gentleman with the black pearl smiled blandly and rapped upon the table.

"Order, gentlemen," he said. "Order for the story of the Queen's Messenger and the czarina's diamonds."

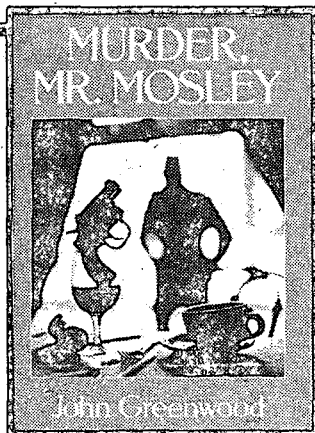
(To be continued in the November issue)

SOLUTION TO THE SEPTEMBER "UNSOLVED":

Mr. Blue is the Pink.

BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



Inspector Jack Mosley is "a cheerful-looking gentleman, who cultivated a shabby appearance and tried to seem older than his 55 years." He is most often seen sporting a black homburg and a flapping raincoat that appears to have no buttons. He makes his rounds by public transport and by foot (occasionally borrowing a bicycle), staunchly refusing to use his own battered old car on police business. His territory is "that no-man's-land between Lancashire and Yorkshire (England) where the county boundaries were changed early in the 1960's and men had suddenly found themselves belonging to a neighbouring race which they had been brought up to hate

from cradle onwards." Mosley's creator, John Greenwood (a pseudonym for a British crime writer), continues his description of Mosley's beat: "One local philosopher, interviewed on radio and asked how he felt about the change, said he did not know how he would be able to stand the climate."

It is this droll quality that enhances the tales of Mosley and the antics of the citizens who inhabit the counties under Mosley's jurisdiction. Mosley, himself a native, exhibits many traits characteristic of the region. He is often implacable, unmovable, always unsurprised. He is always curious, and even his beleaguered superior, a man named

Grimshaw, begrudgingly acknowledges Mosley's facility for knowing everything that's going on in his district. "Mosley's people" is the term headquarters has for the legion of gossips who apparently keep Mosley so well-informed.

"Beneath their dour exteriors, Mosley's people, with the possible exception of Joseph Ormerod (the Assistant Constable), were a sensitive race.... The unpunctuality of brewers' deliveries ... occasionally worried them. And they were somewhat remote from the real world, since they lived in the marginal reception area of several TV networks, which flickered across their screens in a jazzy haze." Someone with less affection for the area called Mosley country a "wilderness peopled by cranks, scarecrows and red-faced, bull-necked defiers of the elements." It's a richly imaginative land that Greenwood has created as Mosley's workplace, and the people and plots that inhabit it are suitably eccentric.

Murder, Mr. Mosley was published three years ago as the series opener. It was an auspicious debut for Inspector Mosley, whose superior officers rather fearfully assign him to the murder of a prodigal daughter who had recently returned to Parson's Fold. To keep Mosley on the track, they gave him

an assistant named Beamish, a "go-getting CID Sergeant from Q Division, an ambitious, intolerant, and alarmingly energetic young man, whose up-to-dateness in his calling caused many senior officers to have to hold their peace in his presence." The two men—who, by all rights, should have proved incompatible — surprisingly team up, although Beamish soon realizes that he is always a step or two behind his inscrutable boss. Greenwood has devised a plot with threads that connect turkey stealing, sibling rivalry, and organized crime to the murder.

Mosley by Moonlight is the next book, and it quickly takes off with a TV interview of Mosley describing a sighting of an alien spaceship—or so it seems in the final editing. Mosley's superior officers next begin doubting his sanity when he furiously issues a rash of nuisance warrants for the arrest of some of the area's leading citizens. Yet when Grimshaw goes to calm their ruffled feathers, he is astonished to find these people Mosley's newest, and steadiest, admirers. There's a wonderful set of characters in this one, including a no-nonsense German woman and a long-disguised murderer.

The latest addition to the series is *The Missing Mr. Mosley*. Someone is advertising the sale

of a real gallows "in working order," for starters. Then there's alarming evidence that an elderly woman has been forcefully abducted from her home, although Mosley's own pipe is found beneath the woman's window! Mosley himself is on his annual leave, claiming that he's on stand-by for an airplane seat to Africa to visit his sister. Beamish, back in the area at Grimshaw's suggestion, begins by looking forward to seeing Mosley again. Soon, however, he's exasperated and then concerned because a small girl and a visiting spinster also disappear—and the countryside seems to be crawling with life-

size gallows. Mosley pops up, only to vanish again, much to Beamish's chagrin. And both Beamish and readers are treated to a huge cast of local "characters" before the plot makes even the slightest sense, an occurrence at the conclusion of the novel.

All of Mosley's fans are awaiting his next appearance, the fourth in what we hope will be a very, very long series of novels.

(Walker and Company publishes the three Mosley books in hardcover; the two early ones are available in Bantam paperback editions.)

MYSTERY REVIEWS

Amos McGuffin, San Francisco private eye, returns to the scene in Robert Upton's **Dead on the Stick** (Viking, \$15.95, 247 pp.), the third book to feature the wisecracking detective who never drinks while on a job—and who does little else when he's off one. McGuffin is likable, and the suspected murder of self-made tycoon Lyle Boone is a crime worth investigating. But the real appeal of *Dead on the Stick* is its background: a very posh, very restricted, very beautiful island golf club in the Bahamas. For those who don't follow the doings of the PGA, Upton has included tidbits about voodoo and millionaires and several other bizarre murders. Still, it's the detailed golf games and tips that make this so lively, even for non-golfers like me. And this book might prove to be a golf buff's favorite mystery this year.

Another mystery with a sports background is Edgar Award-winning **Strike Three, You're Dead** by R. D. Rosen (Signet, \$2.95, 252 pp.). The hero here is Harvey Blissberg, starting center fielder for the Providence Jewels, a down-and-out major league baseball team. Harvey's a pretty easygoing guy who's met a great woman and who's having a great batting season, so he has had little trouble

ignoring the tensions and grudges building up as the Jewels repeatedly lose—that is, until his cocksure roommate, young relief pitcher Rudy Furth, is found murdered in the clubhouse whirlpool. Harvey couldn't be more ingratiating, and Rosen has given the book a real insider's feel. There are plenty of compelling characters, a dash of romance, a generous smattering of suspense, and even a rather hair-raising chase scene. The publisher promises a second Harvey Blissberg novel sometime this year. Look for it; it may be available by the time you read this.

In **Flawless Execution** John Morris is a recently retired AP sportswriter; Julia Sullivan is his friend and, when she's in town, his lover. They are sitting in their favorite NYC bar, watching network football and complaining about sportscaster George Hoagland (the man all America loves to hate), when, along with the rest of the country, they see Hoagland burn to death on camera. Their drinking buddy is the cop assigned to the case, so Morris and Sullivan are in on the investigation from its outset, and it's Morris who discovers the evidence that proves that the massive electrical charge in the headset wasn't a freak accident. Now it's murder, and who is in a better position to interview the prime suspects than an on-the-spot AP reporter? A solid job by John Logue, with some nice interplay between John and Julia, a diverse selection of suspects who add a few twists to the plot, and a truly surprising ending. Add to all that a peek at behind-the-scenes network sportscasting, and you have a mystery worthy of your attention and sleuthing skills. (Ballantine, \$2.95, 199 pp.)

Gabe Wager is a member of the Denver homicide unit, and checking on the doings of two teenage cowboys isn't really in his department. But he agrees to do so as a favor for his old friend, a professional rodeo rider named Tommy Sanchez, who fears that his estranged sons are up to something illegal. Gabe has no luck, and actually is more preoccupied with his relationship with a female police officer. It's not until he has to identify the body of Tommy Sanchez that Wager takes the dead cowboy's fears seriously. And then it quickly becomes very serious indeed. **Ground Money** is author Rex Burns's seventh Gabe Wager mystery, and a good one to pick up if you haven't already discovered this loner cop who works out west. (Viking, \$15.95, 250 pp.)

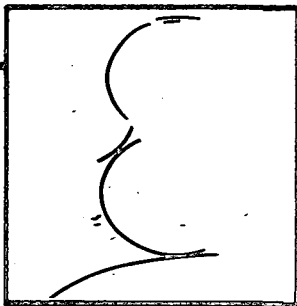
Jersey Tomatoes by J. W. Rider marks a debut, that of private eye Malone of New Jersey, an ex-seminarian and ex-FBI agent who takes on only cases of murder. Militant atheist Charisma Kelly only suspects that her mother didn't commit suicide; and a

wealthy builder and developer can't guarantee that the writer of his death threats will carry out his plans. But there's enough for Malone to go on, and go on he does, along a route that leads past murder and seduction, child abuse and sado-masochism, political graft and monumental greed. This is a novel for adults, tightly paced and tautly written, about a world that allows only the fittest to survive, a world so corrupt that Malone feels justified in playing judge and jury himself. (Arbor House, \$15.95, 272 pp.)

Nominated for the Edgar for the Best Mystery Novel of 1985, **City of Glass** by Paul Auster certainly deserves a mention here. The premise is an intriguing one. Quinn, an anonymous writer of detective stories, gets phone calls asking for a detective. Out of curiosity, perhaps, Quinn impersonates the real detective and makes an appointment to see the "client." He then goes even further, and takes on the job of protecting a wealthy, very secluded young man, twisted by years of imprisonment when he was a child at the hands of his crazed father. Now the young man believes the father, released from prison, will come to kill him. Auster has written a chilling novel of loneliness and cruelty and even psychic survival (but at what cost?), set in Manhattan, pictured as a metaphor for decay, human waste; Auster's characters are human refuse, unwanted and thus discarded onto the junkyard of Manhattan's streets. The prose is spare, reminiscent of some contemporary German writers, but *City of Glass*, good as it is as a novel, can only be called a "mystery" in the broadest sense of the term. It probes the mysteries of life, the dark places of the human soul, asking more questions than it answers, using the barest skeleton of a plot on which the author hangs his characters and his dark themes. (Sun & Moon Press, \$13.95, 203 pp.)

MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



The Italian television network RAI has produced a documentary called **Hitchcock: the Thrill of Genius**, featuring interviews with some of the stars and writers who worked on Hitchcock's movies. Most of the footage covers his Hollywood years, which began when he left England in 1940 to direct *Rebecca*. Joan Fontaine played the bride who marries Laurence Olivier only to be haunted by his former wife, Rebecca. Fontaine remembers the infinite care Hitchcock took over her every gesture: "He would tell me whether to raise an eyebrow."

In Hollywood Hitchcock became the world's best known movie director, with the possible exception of Cecil B. de

Mille. Actors after Joan Fontaine, however, found that Hitchcock worked in an aura of mystery. The great man did not give them screen tests or conduct interviews with them. Typically, he chose Tippi Hedren for *The Birds* (1963) after happening to see her do a television commercial (shown in the documentary) for Sego, a diet drink. Nor would he any longer reveal to his actors how they were supposed to act. "Just say your lines," he invariably replied when asked for direction. Obviously his famous effects became more important to him than acting performances, which understandably grew less and less impressive as he continued to make movies.

Many of those interviewed in

the documentary recall the enormous effort that went into Hitchcock's most famous scenes. Farley Granger, who starred in *Rope* (1948), recalls two days of rehearsal for each of that adapted stage play's ten minute sequences, during which the walls and furniture were moved mechanically out of the way as the actors went from one part to another of the set. Ray Milland recalls having to redo a long scene in *Dial M for Murder* (1954) after Hitchcock noticed that at one point he had briefly limped on the wrong leg. In *The Trouble With Harry* (1956), when the fall foliage at the movie's Connecticut location proved to be disappointing in color, brighter leaves were trucked in and hung on the trees. In *Psycho* (1960), Janet Leigh recalls spending seven days shooting the famous shower scene. The English actor Barry Foster remembers spending three agonizing days enacting the rape of his fellow performer and friend Barbara Leigh-Hunt in *Frenzy* (1972). *The Birds*, technically the most difficult movie of all, took six months to shoot.

Hitchcock's stars never got to know him. He worked closely on his movies with his wife, Alma Reville, and was jealous of his private life with her and their daughter. On the set he was usually bored, since he had

already worked out each shot with painstaking care. He was apparently ill at ease with his stars on account of embarrassment over his own weight in comparison with their good looks, which he envied. Ann Todd, who played defense lawyer Gregory Peck's almost-betrayed wife in *The Paradine Case* (1947), and who emerges from the documentary as the most astute former star, notes the significance of Hitchcock's preference for cold, blonde heroines like herself. He needed to create mysterious, ladylike women whose unattainable beauty he could contrive to demean.

It was no wonder that Hitchcock, who dealt with his obsessions by putting them on film rather than reaching out to friends, was a lonely figure in his last years. Never having gotten over his childhood fear of the police, he projected the frightening image of a state trooper looking down at Janet Leigh in *Psycho*. Afraid of life itself, as some of those who knew him testify, he projected onto the screen fears that no one who has seen his movies can forget.

We hope that *Hitchcock: The Thrill of Genius* will soon be scheduled for commercial release. When it is, *Murder by Direction* will carry the announcement.

THE STORY THAT WON



Arthur Press

The May Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by Cynthia Todd Cappello of River Grove, Illinois. Honorable mentions go to Mark Truman of Midway City, California; William E. Nixon of Robinson, Pennsylvania; Luise Foged of Byron, California; Enid Cohen of Walnut Creek, California; G. Frederick Cottle of Toledo, Ohio; Michael C. McPherson of Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada; Janet E. Streilein of Johnstown, Pennsylvania; John A. Macari of Ypsilanti, Michigan; Mary Kelly Walsh of Lombard, Illinois; Marion Mitchell MacKay of East Jordan, Michigan; Donna Morris of Newport, Kentucky; and O. R. Owens of Watonga, Oklahoma.

CHANGE FOR THE BETTOR by Cynthia Todd Cappello

Harold puffed audibly as he neared the end of his climb. He was right on time. The last rays of the sun cast long shadows on the valley floor below. He felt exhilarated. He had beaten the old witch at her own game.

Letitia had always hated him, ever since he'd married her mousey daughter. Little good Martha had been: always sickly, always complaining about his gambling, his drinking, his eating habits. When she died last year, Letitia had acted irrationally, as if it were *his* fault.

Although not usually superstitious, Harold knew his mother-in-law was behind his recent run of bad luck. A self-proclaimed psychic/fortune-teller, she had somehow given him the "evil eye." What else could explain last month's food poisoning, last week's pink slip (drinking on the job), and his inability to pick a winner in months?

Yesterday, desperate, he'd confronted her with his hunting rifle and demanded she remove—no, *reverse*—this curse. Cornered, she had reluctantly told him of a far ridge in the desert mountains, a place of Indian legends. It is said that one who stands there at sunset will find himself and his fortune.

Triumphant, Harold stood surveying the land below. His own shadow atop the ridge was beginning to sway, to alter. This is it, he thought. His luck was changing; he'd be rich! It was then he noticed the hindquarters, the hooves, the curly tail . . .

"Whatever happened to Harold?" asked her neighbor.

"That swine?" said Letitia.

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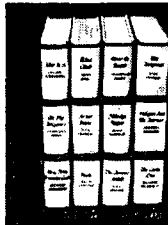
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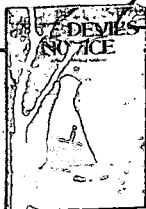
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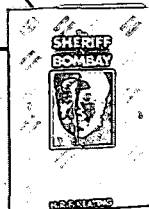
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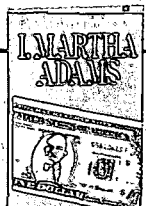
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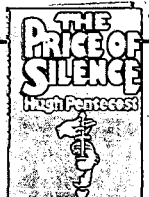
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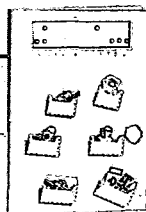
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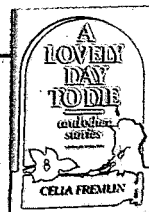
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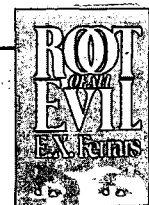
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